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# ST. LOUIS NIGHTS WI' BURNS



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*Yours Sincerely*  
*W. K. Dixie*

*President*  
*The Burns Club of St. Louis*

# ST. LOUIS NIGHTS WI' BURNS

BURNS AND RELIGION  
REV. DR. W. C. BITTING

BURNS, THE WORLD POET  
WILLIAM MARION REEDY

BURNS AND ENGLISH POETRY  
PROFESSOR J. L. LOWES

BURNS AND THE PROPHET ISAIAH  
JUDGE M. N. SALE

BURNS AND THE AULD CLAY BIGGIN  
FREDERICK W. LEHMANN



THE CLUB, THE ROOM, THE BURNSIANA,  
THE NIGHTS

WALTER B. STEVENS

Printed for Private Distribution  
to Lovers of Burns  
by  
The Burns Club of St. Louis  
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THE MEM'RY O' BURNS



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## ST. LOUIS NIGHTS WI' BURNS

*To the Immortal Memory, the Burns Club of St. Louis dedicates its fourth tribute in printer's ink. "Poems and Letters in Facsimile" was the club's initial contribution to Burns literature. This was followed by "Burns Nights in St. Louis." More recently was reproduced in facsimile the "Lines to Burns" by Chang Yow Tong, a member of the Imperial Chinese Commission at the World's Fair. The cordial reception given to these privately issued publications by lovers of Burns in many parts of the world encouraged the club to present "St. Louis Nights wi' Burns."*

*This club exists, in the words of the by-laws, "for the purpose of commemorating the life and genius of Robert Burns." The purpose had its original expression in the Burns Cottage at the World's Fair of 1904. Reproductions of palaces, copies of historic mansions, imposing types of architecture of many lands were grouped in "The Place of Nations," as it was called. In the midst of them was the replica of the clay-walled, straw-thatched birth-place of him who "brought from Heaven to man the message of the dignity of humanity." It was built and maintained by the Burns Cottage Association, composed of men who had found inspiration in the creed of Burns. The Burns Club of St. Louis succeeded the Cottage Association. It has a permanent home in the upper chamber of the quaint house of the Artists' Guild. Here, about the great fireplace, the club has assembled treasured relics of Burns' life. Upon the walls are portraits of Burns, sketches of scenes made familiar by his writings and facsimilies of many poems in his handwriting. The chamber is open to the rafters. It has little windows high up under the eaves. The whole interior architecture accords with the collection of Burnsiana and with the uses to which the chamber is put by the club.*

*Anniversaries of Burns are observed by the Burns Club of St. Louis in ways original. Not forgotten are the*

oatmeal cake, the haggis, the Scotch shortbread. There are "barley bree an' sic like at ca."

"But nane need drink that are na dry."

By way of introduction to the dinner the president repeats the Selkirk Grace:

Some hae meat, and canna eat,  
And some wad eat that want it;  
But we hae meat and we can eat,  
And sae the Lord be thanket.

In numbers the club is not unwieldy. The members fill comfortably the table running the length of the chamber, with room for a congenial guest or two. There is enough Scotch blood in the gathering to save the flavor of Scotch speech. But the membership ranges widely in nativity, in creed and in vocation. The spirit of Burns pervades and abides. Lines with which this spirit is invoked are found by the president of the club in such quotations from Burns as the bard's own farewell to the brethren of St. James lodge at Tarbolton:

A last request permit me here  
When yearly ye assemble a',  
One round, I ask it with a tear,  
To him, the Bard, that's far awa'.

As the night progresses, there are stories of Burns; there are spirited discussions on opinions about Burns; there are quotations and interpretations; there is singing of songs of "rantin' rovin' Robin."

The more formal event of the evening is a thoughtful address on Burns, sometimes given by a member of the club, sometimes delivered by a guest. A member of the club returning to his chair from the most recent of these St. Louis Nights wi' Burns gave this editorial expression to his feeling:

One of the proofs of the greatness of Robert Burns as a poet is the fact that his birthday celebrations are unsurpassed as feasts of reason and flow of soul. The subject is inexhaustibly rich and enjoyable.

The editor had sat for an hour under the spell of Rev. Dr. Bitting's vivid tracing of relationship between Robert Burns and religious matters. W. B. S.

# BURNS AND RELIGIOUS MATTERS

By Rev. Dr. W. C. Bitting,  
Pastor, Second Baptist Church, St. Louis

January 25, 1913

ONLY the most surprising results of original research could yield anything new about Robert Burns. Every Scotchman has exhausted himself, and almost everybody else, in the effort to find a fresh ray for the aureole of the Ayrshire poet. Even invention has not been ignored. He has already passed the first stage in his canonization, since some of his Caledonian adorers do not deem sober facts ample enough to account for the real and imaginary glories of Burns. They have also allured other nationalities into their growing cult. The puzzles of the personality of their fellow countryman have entrapped the interest of many nations. Burns is high up on the Scotch totem pole.

It is most natural that any reader of the poet should use his own spectacles. I have therefore chosen "Robert Burns and Religious Matters" as my topic for this evening. We must not put upon him our modern twentieth century ideals, because they are developments since his day. He must be judged only by the standards of his own times. Scarcely anything could be more fertile in error and misconception than to thrust back upon any past age attainments and ideals of which it knew nothing. It should not be condemned for failure to stand the test of a higher life developed later than itself. And yet this is the foolish way in which the ignorant always study the Bible, or religion, and all things else. To judge of Burns' attitude to religious matters we must know the conditions in his times. He was a true son of his age.

Burns was an incarnation of contradictions. They appear in his poems, life and letters. He was equally

at home with the philosophers in Edinburgh or the roistering bacchanalians in Poesie Nansie's dram shop. Salon and saloon alike allured him. He was dainty and dirty in the same poem, saintly and satanic in the same amour. He satirized and sanctified the church in the same criticism. Angel and demon are equally in evidence in his own heart. He could write glorious lines for his father's epitaph, and erotic boasts of his own shame at the same time. As Carlyle says, "Wild desires and wild Repentance alternately oppress him." We would amend by substituting simultaneously for "alternately." "His mind was at variance with itself," is an accurate judgment by the same biographer. He was a lover at once devilish and divine. All this shows itself in what he wrote because it was his life. In 1786, at the age of twenty-seven years, he wrote to Robert Aiken, "Even in the hour of social mirth, my gaiety is the madness of an intoxicated criminal under the hands of the executioner." And in this he was not alone. St. Paul himself had the same strife (Ro. 7:19-23). All of us know the same experience. It is inevitable. It is the evidence of our slow human evolution from beasts into men. It is absent from no heart and life. Only, these two elements vary in different persons. In Burns both shone brilliantly. Now we are sure that the holy life will triumph, and now we are certain that he has resigned himself to carnality, and finally the old puzzle remains unsolved, and insoluble except as an illustration of the upward pull of man, and the downward pull of the beast, in their eternal tug of war over our souls.

But this mixture glows in its perplexity in Burns only to those who fail to realize a very splendid trait of character revealed in all that he was and did. He was sincere. This showed itself in two ways. He had a mind like the sensitive plate of a camera. It photographed things. He painted what he saw, whether the uprooted daisy, the limping hare, the field mouse, the

peasant worker, the lass, the kirk, the preacher, the drunken beggar, the besotted tramp, or the pious home. So accurate is he in this social and literary photography that we can construct almost the whole of his environment from his literature. He will not, like the modern journalist, distort and lie about men and events. Moreover, he sang what he felt. He is autobiographic. As few writers he turns himself inside out and lets us see the crevices and corners of his soul. He is what he is, and lets us see what he is. It may not be always good, and is not always bad, but he has no use for the sign "No Admittance" over his soul. He makes trespassing impossible because he throws open the whole of himself to all the world. There is no reserve spot, no private ground with a barbed wire fence about it. We can tramp over every nook of his soul. Our feet are now soiled with his filth, now dance with his glee, and now we sit down and pull off our shoes for we step from hell upon holy ground almost in an instant. Mountains and meadows, sun spots and shades, altitudes and caverns of his being are all open to the public, and over everything is the word, "Welcome."

This quality of sincerity revealed both in photographing what is external, and in uncovering himself, is essentially religious. Burns was no hypocrite, and was unsparing in his detestation of hypocrisy. These words in an epistle to John Rankine show his scorn for sham saints. He writes in delicious irony:

"Hypocrisy, in mercy spare it!  
That holy robe, oh, dinna tear it!  
Spare't for their sakes wha often wear it,  
The lads in black!  
But your curst wit, when it comes near it,  
Rives't aff their back.

Think, wicked sinner, wha ye're skaithing  
It's just the blue-gown badge and claithing  
O' saunts; tak that, ye lea'e them naething  
To ken them by,  
Frae ony unregenerate heathen  
Like you or I."

He had no use for make-believe either in literature or in living. He ripped off veneering whenever he saw it. He wore no mask and detested masqueraders in life or letters. He loved nakedness. Would that he could now tear off the disguises of our modern business, literature, religion, and social life. He is needed to expose the degrading adoration of the dollar that twists into hideous deformity our newspapers,, industries, parlors, politics, and sometimes our churches. This prophetic spirit he had, as we shall see. It is this very sincerity that yields us the astonishing and puzzling mixture of light and night in poem and person. But it explains the puzzle, since it tells us that he was only human. It clarifies the problem because in him humanity was unusual. Most men are only embryonic. Only the minority pass the period of gestation. He is not grayish neutrality. He was no uninteresting nondescript. A brilliant devil is more fascinating than a dull saint. Likewise a sincere saint, even if only really a caricature, is more interesting than a conventional imp.

Let us now look at some of the directions in which this camera poet turned his lens, and also gaze into the soul by means of his own confessions. We are not his judges, but only reporters. We are not here to appraise his qualities so much as to describe them.

1. *He made use of and revered the Bible.* Of course it was the Bible as conceived in his day, not the Book that our modern sane and reverent scholarship gives us. His poems have many quotations from the Scriptures. His letters give ample evidence of his familiarity with them. His "songs" are almost lacking in allusions to them. Like the majority of modern men and church members, he read the Bible with a kind of superstitious reverence, glorified it as the "Word of God," according to the cant of orthodoxy, used it as a source of quotations, but failed to incarnate its teachings. In this respect he was neither worse nor better than his orthodox contemporaries. If his vices of the flesh violated some of the ideals of the Bible, theirs



smashed other spiritual and intellectual ideals of the Scriptures. His uses of passages from the Book are all conventional. He exchanged Bibles with Jean Armour one Sunday under the most solemn circumstances. His own, in two volumes, was inscribed in his own hand. In volume I was written, "And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, I am the Lord, Levit. 19th chapter, 12th verse." In volume II, "Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oath. Matth. 5th chapter 33d verse." In the whirl of passion that followed this sentimentally holy pledge he forgot both passages. It is interesting to note that Mary Campbell's name was in one of these volumes given to Jean as pledge, but both Mary's and Robert's names were almost obliterated when the two volumes were found. Did Jean Armour try to erase Mary Campbell's in jealousy, and Burns' in anger?

Like all of us Burns quoted Scripture to reinforce his own plans, views, and moral conditions. What would we do without such a consolatory convenience? His quotations are from all parts of both Testaments, and often there are allusions without quotations. It is true that no one can thoroughly understand Burns' poems or letters without some knowledge of the Bible. The same is true of Shakespeare and Ruskin. The knowledge of the Scriptures is necessary if one would read English literature intelligently. No one who is ignorant of the Bible can call himself cultured. And no unintelligent familiarity with the mere language of the Bible qualifies one to speak sanely of its character or teachings. One may know its words by heart from cover to cover, and yet be densely ignorant of its nature and significance.

Burns has left us splendid versifications of the first Psalm, and part of the 90th. How we wish he had revised many of the uncouth and ragged metrical versions of his time. Many of his ancestors and contemporaries, judged by their products, appear to have thought that piety and good poetry are inconsistent. This mistake is also common today.

In the Cotter's Saturday Night he has described family worship at the close of the week. Doubtless he has there photographed for us his father's priesthood in the home. There is no satire therein. Burns' shafts were only for hypocrisy. No doubt his knowledge of the Bible came from his own reading of the Book, as well as from family prayers, and the church services. In all his published works there is no sneer at the Bible, no word to detract from its influence over life. On the contrary he is always reverent, even in the face of many things that would naturally provoke such a sincere soul to satire. He had enough brains, as some even in our day do not, to distinguish between the Holy Book itself, and the misuse of it by ardent but mistaken friends. His "Epistle to John Goudie, Kilmarnock," called out by Goudie's essay on the authority of the Scriptures, evidently an assault upon the orthodox view of the time, shows Burns' deep sympathy with any movement that would end devotion to the "letter that killeth."

"Poor gapin', glowrin,<sup>1</sup> Superstition,  
 Waes me! she's in a sad condition;  
 Fie! bring Black Jock,<sup>2</sup> her state physician,  
 To see her water:  
 Alas! there's ground o' great suspicion  
 She'll ne'er get better.

Auld Orthodoxy long did grapple  
 But now she's got an unco ripple;<sup>3</sup>  
 Haste, gie her name up i' the chapel,  
 Nigh unto death;  
 See how she fetches at the thrapple,<sup>4</sup>  
 And gasps for breath!

Enthusiasm's past redemption,  
 Gaen' in a galloping consumption,  
 Not a' the quacks, wi' a' their gumption,  
 Will ever mend her.  
 Her feeble pulse gies strong presumption  
 Death soon will end her."

<sup>1</sup>Staring.

<sup>2</sup>Rev. Jno. Russell, Kilmarnock, one of the heroes of the "Twa Herds."

<sup>3</sup>Pain in back and loins.

<sup>4</sup>Throat.



II. *Burns' Theology. He believed in God.* He did not believe in such a capricious deity as was preached by the ultra-Calvinism prevalent in his day. It was not God himself, but a caricature of him that Burns satirized. Without the training that qualified him to debate with the theological logicians of his day, and without the ecclesiastical standing that could give him the opportunity to do so, even if he had been technically prepared, he had left no weapon but ridicule. We can enjoy what must have been most distressing and irreverent to the theologians and their unthinking followers of his time. Listen to this from Holy Willie's Prayer.

"O Thou, wha in the heavens dost dwell,  
Wha, as it pleases best thyself,  
Sends aye to heaven, and ten to hell,  
A' for thy glory,  
And nae for ony guid or ill  
They've done afore thee!

When frae my mither's womb I fell,  
Thou might hae plunged me into hell,  
To gnash my gums, to weep and wail,  
In burnin' lake,  
Whare damnèd devils roar and yell,  
Chain'd to a stake."

What stronger picture could we have of the arbitrary God created by the necessities of Augustinian and Calvinistic theology?

Turn from this to Burns' own view of God. Read this prayer written in a time of contrition.

"O Thou great Being! what Thou art  
Surpasses me to know:  
Yet sure I am, that known to Thee  
Are all Thy works below.

Thy creature here before Thee stands,  
All wretched and distress;  
Yet sure those ills that wring my soul  
Obey thy high behest.

Sure Thou, Almighty, canst not act  
From cruelty or wrath!  
Oh, free my weary eyes from tears,  
Or close them fast in death!

But if I must afflicted be,  
To suit some wise design;  
Then man my soul with firm resolves,  
To bear and not repine!"

And this prayer written "in the prospect of death."

"O Thou unknown, Almighty Cause  
Of all my hope and fear,  
In whose dread presence, ere an hour,  
Perhaps I must appear!

If I have wander'd in those paths  
Of life I ought to shun;  
As something, loudly, in my breast,  
Remonstrates I have done;

Thou know'st that Thou has form'd me  
With passions wild and strong;  
And listening to their witching voice  
Has often led me wrong.

Where human weakness has come short,  
Or frailty stept aside,  
Do Thou, All-good! for such Thou art,  
In shades of darkness hide.

Where with intention I have err'd,  
No other plea I have,  
But, Thou art good; and goodness still  
Delighteth to forgive."

In none of his poems does he call God "Father." The Christian name for God is found in his letters, but nowhere else. He speaks of him as "Almighty Cause," "All Good," "Author of Life," "Great Governor of all below," "Omnipotent Divine." He is a theist. He declares

"An atheist's laugh's a poor exchange  
For Deity offended."

And yet in an Epistle to David Sillar he has a beautiful stanza about his Jean, in which he addresses God,

"O Thou, whose very self art love!"

Scant indeed are his allusions to Jesus Christ. In a letter to Mrs. Dunlop, Dec. 13, 1789, he writes:

"Jesus Christ, thou amiablest of characters! I trust Thou are no impostor, and that thy revelation of blissful scenes of existence beyond death and the grave is not one of the many impositions which time after time have been palmed on credulous mankind. I trust that in Thee "shall all the families of the earth be blessed," by being yet connected together in a better world, where every tie that bound heart to heart, in this state of existence, shall be, far beyond our present conceptions, more endearing."

Burns seems far more familiar with sin and the devil than with righteousness and the Deity. His "Address to the Deil" embodies the traditional Miltonian Satan, with touches of current peasant notions, and pulpit ideas of his nocturnal visits to the trysting places with which Burns was familiar. As for sin, he had no philosophy of it, but a vast experience of its terrible reality. He knows it sorely. Read this written "in the prospect of death." Only bitter experience could have penned it:

"For guilt, for guilt, my terrors are in arms;  
I tremble to approach an angry God,  
And justly smart beneath His sin-avenging rod.

Fain would I say, 'Forgive my foul offence!'

Fain promise never more to disobey;  
But should my Author health again dispense,  
Again I might desert fair Virtue's way;  
Again in folly's path might go astray;  
Again exalt the brute and sink the man;

Then how should I for heavenly mercy pray,

Who act so counter heavenly mercy's plan?

Who sin so oft have mourn'd, yet to temptation ran."

As to the future Burns often expressed himself. He strongly believed in a life beyond the grave. In 1789 he writes to one whose name is not given, and addresses Ferguson who is dead :

"If there be a life beyond the grave, which I trust there is; and if there be a good God presiding over all nature, which I am sure there is; thou art now enjoying existence in a glorious world, where worth of the heart alone is distinction in the man; where riches, deprived of all their pleasure-purchasing powers, return to their native sordid matter; where titles and honours are the disregarded reveries of an idle, dream; and where the *heavy virtue, which is the negative consequence of steady dulness*, and those thoughtless, though often destructive, follies, which are the unavoidable aberrations of frail human nature, will be thrown into equal oblivion as if they had never been!"

To Mrs. Dunlop the same year :

"Religion, my dear friend, is the true comfort! A strong persuasion in a future state of existence; a proposition so obviously probable that, setting revelation aside; every nation and people, so far as investigation has reached, for at least near four thousand years, have in some mode or other firmly believed it. In vain would we reason and pretend to doubt. I have myself done so to a very daring pitch; but when I reflected that I was opposing the most ardent wishes and the most darling hope of good men, and flying in the face of all human belief in all ages, I was shocked at my own conduct."

To Mr. Cunningham the next year :

"I hate a man that wishes to be a Deist; but I fear every fair unprejudiced inquirer must in some degree be a sceptic. It is not that there are any very staggering arguments against the immortality of man; but, like electricity, phlogiston, &c., the subject is so involved in darkness that we want data to go upon. One thing frightens me much; that we are to live forever, seems *too good news to be true*. That we are to enter into a new scene of existence, where, exempt from want and pain, we shall enjoy ourselves and our friends without satiety or separation—how much should I be indebted to any one who could fully assure me that this was certain!

Burns believed in man, and that is a large part of the religion of Jesus who had the optimism to hope

that he could reach the dregs, and save the flotsam and jetsam of the race. "The Jolly Beggars," and "Man was made to Mourn," and "Is there, for Honest Poverty?" and many other expressions reveal his love for man as man. His famous lines are quoted all over the world:

"The rank is but the guinea's stamp,  
The Man's the gowd for a' that."

"Then let us pray that come if may—  
As come it will for a' that—  
That sense and worth, o'er a' the earth,  
May bear the gree, and a' that;  
For a' that, and a' that,  
It's comin' yet for a' that,  
That man to man, the world o'er,  
Shall brothers be for a' that."

And these two ideals, the worth of the individual, and human brotherhood are distinctly Christian teachings. But the Calvinism of Burns' day did not do them justice.

III. *Burns' attitude towards the Church is unmistakable.* The minister and session of the Church to which he belonged had properly protected its reputation and discipline by forcing the young libertine to submit to the penalties prescribed for such flagrant derelictions as his. The effect of this discipline upon Burns was not at all redemptive. He needed love, not castigation. But beyond this personal reason for vindictiveness there were two other reasons that animated his satires on current ecclesiasticism, both of which we must approve. First, his growing mind, so absolutely sincere, could not tolerate the artificial doctrine he had been taught; and second, his thoroughly transparent nature could not brook the hypocrisy in the lives of many church members. Three things, his experience of church discipline, his honest intellectual life, and his hatred of shams combined to produce satires that stand unsurpassed in their class. The list is long.

In "The Twa Herds" he describes two preachers, who had been intimate friends, quarrelling over parish boundaries. In this satire he names no less than eleven ministers.

"O Moodie man, and wordy Russell,  
How could you raise so vile a bustle,  
Ye'll see how New-Light herds will whistle,  
And think it fine:  
The Lord's cause ne'er gat sic a twistle  
Sin' I hae min'.

What flock wi' Moodie's flock could rank,  
Sae hale and hearty every shank?  
Nae poison'd sour Arminian stank  
He let them taste.  
Frae Calvin's well, aye clear, they drank—  
Oh, sic a feast!"

They Orthodoxy yet may prance,  
And Learning in a woody<sup>1</sup> dance,  
And that fell cur ca'd Common Sense,  
That bites sae sair,  
Be banish'd o'er the sea to France:  
Let him bark there."

---

<sup>1</sup>Halter.

In "Holy Willie's Prayer," he satirizes the petition of William Fisher, a drunkard and libertine, who had been active in denying Burns' friend, Gavin Hamilton, church privileges because he made a journey on Sunday, and on another Sunday got one of his servants to take in some potatoes from the garden. It is the prayer of a 33d degree Pharisee, as Burns writes it. And in the "Epitaph on Holy Willie," he addresses the Devil, closing as follows:

But hear me, sir, deil as ye are,  
Look something to your credit;  
A coof<sup>2</sup> like him wad stain your name,  
If it were kent ye did it."

---

<sup>2</sup>Fool.

In "The Ordination," he takes off the devotion to traditionalism, and the hobbies of ministers who torment candidates for the pastorate. He names some of them. Hear one stanza that reflects Burns' consciousness of his discipline:

"There, try his mettle on the creed,  
And bind him down wi' caution,  
That stipend is a carnal weed  
He taks but for the fashion;  
And gie him owre the flock to feed,  
And punish each transgression;  
Especial, rams that cross the breed,  
Gie them sufficient threshin,  
Spare them nae day."

In his "Address to the Unco Guid, or the Rigidly Righteous" he satirizes those complacent saints who spend their time in pointing out the sins of others.

"Ye see your state wi' theirs compared,  
And shudder at the niffer,<sup>1</sup>  
But cast a moment's fair regard,  
What makes the mighty differ?  
Discount what scant occasion gave,  
That purity ye pride in,  
And (what's aft mair than a' the lave)  
Your better art o' hiding.

Then gently scan your brother man,  
Still gentler sister woman;  
Though they may gang a kennin<sup>2</sup> wrang,  
To step aside, is human:  
One point must still be greatly dark,  
The moving *why* they do it:  
And just as lamely can ye mark  
How far perhaps they rue it.

Who made the heart, 'tis He alone  
Decidedly can try us;  
He knows each chord—its various tone,  
Each spring—its various bias:  
Then at the balance let's be mute,  
We never can adjust it;  
What's done we partly may compute,  
But know not what's resisted."

---

<sup>1</sup>Comparison.

<sup>2</sup>A little bit.

In "The Holy Fair," the keenest of all his diatribes, he satirizes what had become a scandal and disgrace to the Church, the tattle, and giddiness, the social abuses that had sprung up about the observance of the Holy Communion. Here also he names many ministers. Hear his description of Moodie's sermon:

"Hear how he clears the points o' faith  
Wi' rattlin' and wi' thumpin'!  
Now meekly calm, now wild in wrath,  
He's stampin' and he's jumpin'!  
His lengthen'd chin, his turn'd-up snout,  
His eldritch<sup>1</sup> squeal, and gestures,  
Oh, how they fire the heart devout,  
Like cantharidian plasters,  
On sic a day!"

<sup>1</sup>Unearthly.

And his comment on the result of the day's doings:

"How many hearts this day converts  
O' sinners and o' lasses!  
Their hearts o' stane, gin night, are gane,<sup>1</sup>  
As saft as ony flesh is.  
There's some are fou o' love divine;  
There's some are fou o' brandy;  
And many jobs that day begin  
May end in houghmagandy<sup>2</sup>  
Some ither day."

<sup>1</sup>Gone.

<sup>2</sup>Childbirth.

Hear how he described the love of dogma mingled with the neglect of ethics, in "A Dedication to Gavin Hamilton." It is keen irony:

"Morality thou deadly bane,  
Thy tens o' thousands thou hast slain!  
Vain is his hope whose stay and trust is  
In moral mercy, truth, and justice!

No—stretch a point to catch a plack;<sup>1</sup>  
Abuse a brother to his back:  
Steal through a winnock<sup>2</sup> frae a whore,  
But point the rake that taks the door.  
Be to the poor like ony whunstone,  
And haud their noses to the grunstone,  
Ply every art o' legal thieving;  
No matter, stick to sound believing.



Learn three-mile prayers, and half-mile graces,  
 Wi' weel-spread looves,<sup>1</sup> and lang wry faces;  
 Grunt up a solemn, lengthen'd groan,  
 And damn a' parties but your own;  
 I'll warrant then, ye're nae deceiver—  
 A steady, sturdy, staunch believer."

<sup>1</sup>A coin, one-third of a penny.

<sup>2</sup>Window.

<sup>3</sup>Palms of hands.

In "The Kirk's Alarm," he described the consternation of the theologians over the alleged heterodoxy of McGill, and Dalrymple, two ministers of Ayr. Here also he mentions many names.

"Orthodox, orthodox,  
 Wha believe in John Knox,  
 Let me sound an alarm to your conscience—  
 There's a heretic blast  
 Has been blawn i' the wast,  
 That what is not sense must be nonsense.  
 Doctor Mac,<sup>1</sup> Doctor Mac,  
 You should stretch on a rack  
 To strike evil doers wi' terror;  
*To join faith and sense,  
 Upon ony pretence,  
 Is heretic, damnable error.*  
 Calvin's sons, Calvin's sons,  
 Seize your spiritual guns,  
 Ammunition you never can need;  
 Your hearts are the stuff  
 Will be powther enough,  
 And your skulls are storehouses o' lead.  
 Poet Burns, Poet Burns,  
 Wi' your priest-skelping turns,  
 Why desert ye your auld native shire?  
 Your Muse is a gipsy—  
 E'en though she were tipsy,  
 She could ca' us nae waur than we are."

<sup>1</sup>McGill.

In his "Elegy on Peg Nicholson," a "good bay mare" that belonged to his friend, Burns closes with a stanza that expressed his contempt for the people that stood the Auld-Light ministry.

"Peg Nicholson was a good bay mare,  
 And the priest he rode her sair;  
 And much oppressed and bruised she was  
 As priest-rid cattle are."

In "Death and Dr. Hornbook," he expresses his opinion of some preachers in the following fashion:

"Some books are lies fra end to end  
And some great lies were never penn'd:  
E'en ministers, they hae been kenn'd,  
In holy rapture,  
A rousing whid<sup>1</sup> at times to vend,  
And nail't wi' Scripture."

---

<sup>1</sup>Lie.

Burns at the request of his friend Hamilton brought him the text of a sermon he heard a minister preach. It was "And they shall go forth and grow up like calves of the stall," Mal. 4:2. On this sermon he wrote "The Calf." Listen to these stanzas:

"Right, sir! your text I'll prove it true,  
Though heretics may laugh;  
For instance, there's yoursel just now,  
God knows, an unco calf!

And should some patron be so kind  
And bless you wi' a kirk,  
I doubt na, sir, but then we'll find  
Ye're still as great a stirk.<sup>1</sup>

And when ye're number'd wi' the dead,  
Below a grassy hillock,  
Wi' justice they may mark your head,  
'Here lies a famous bullock!'"

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<sup>1</sup>A one-year-old bullock.

In a letter to a New-Light minister, Rev. John M'Math, enclosing a copy of "Holy Willie's Prayer," he writes his opinion of the Auld-Light preachers:

"But I gae mad at their grimaces,  
Their sighin', cantin', grace-proud faces,  
Their three-mile prayers, and half-mile graces;  
Their raxin'<sup>1</sup> conscience,  
Whase greed, revenge, and pride disgraces  
Waur nor<sup>2</sup> their nonsense.

O Pope, had I thy satire's darts,  
To gie the rascals their deserts,  
I'd rip their rotten, hollow hearts,  
And tell aloud,  
Their jugglin' hocus-pocus arts,  
To cheat the crowd.

God knows, I'm no the thing I should be,  
Nor am I even the thing I could be,  
But twenty times I rather would be  
An atheist clean,  
Than under gospel colours hid be  
Just for a screen."

---

<sup>1</sup>Stretching.

<sup>2</sup>Worse than.

All these things and others were not aimed at the Church, still less at religion itself, but were deadly shots at ministerial shams, at theological fictions, human make-believes, and noisome fungi that had attached themselves to the tree of life. Read this from his letter to M'Math:

"All hail, Religion! maid divine!  
Pardon a Muse sae mean as mine,  
Who, in her rough imperfect line,  
Thus daurs to name thee;  
To stigmatise false friends of thine  
Can ne'er defame thee.

O Ayr! my dear, my native ground,  
Within thy presbyterial bound,  
A candid liberal band is found  
Of public teachers,  
As men, as Christians too, renown'd,  
And manly preachers."

The movement to rationalize the current theology was called "Common Sense." It was ridiculed as heresy as are all movements away from the unbelievable products of literalism, and of mechanical interpretation of the Scriptures. With this movement, espoused by a faction that came to be called "New-Lights," in distinction from the orthodox "Auld-Lights," Burns was

in hearty sympathy. A most amusing description of the difference between Auld-Lights and New-Lights, illustrated by their contradictory opinions about the moon will be found in the Postscript to his delightful "Epistle to William Simpson." Many regret that these satires were written. But such critics fail to realize the reasons as given above, and also the good they did in laying bare Pharisaism and pretense. Inevitably they produced in the minds of some persons coarse and profane thoughts about sacred things. There are always some who cannot distinguish between religion and its vehicles and expressions. But Burns was a photographer here also. There is no evidence that he exaggerated conditions. Moreover, he carefully distinguished between the genuine and the counterfeit, and aimed to retire from circulation what he thought was spurious. Against religion itself he uttered not a word of ridicule. He tore off only its current provincial and grotesque garments. In proof of this remember that "The Cotter's Saturday Night," which Lockhart and many others deem his best poem, was written by the same heart and hand, and about the same time as "The Holy Fair," his most effective satire. Because he could honestly praise his father's religion and reverence for the Bible, he was forced to condemn pretence and irreverent misuse of the Scriptures. He told the truth, and that is what hurt. There was often antagonism between Scotch verse and Scotch theology. How interesting it would be if we could collect all that he wrote about Moodie, and see how the preacher Burns so cordially despised appeared to the poet. In all this Burns really performed a service for which religion should always be thankful. If good people are the "salt of the earth," and religion is really the saving factor in social life, the uncovering of sham living and thinking in any age is a social service. The weaklings who are fed on the pap of ages, who walk the way of life staked out by pious aristocrats that assume to regulate the paths of

the multitude, who jog along therein to the age-old drum beat of a hierarchy, who prattle and chatter the vocabulary of cant, who fuss over millinery and genuflections, who row over shibboleths, who think to please God with the holy stink of an incense pot, who confuse form with substance, who substitute creed-mongering for righteousness, will always squirm when any realist tears away mere accidents in order to reveal essence. Yet this method often seems to be the only way to emancipation. The process is painful to many, but salutary.

IV. *Burns' ideas of religion.* It was a true judgment of Burns that religion itself is something more vital than theories about the inspiration of the Bible, and the logic and syllogisms of theologians, and church membership. He saw all this confused with religion. However much or little may be lacking in his conceptions of what religion is will depend upon the standards of the critic. There are, however, utterances of Burns that prove that he carried his characteristic sincerity and transparency into his ideas of religion. He writes to Mr. Cunningham, "But of all nonsense, religious nonsense is the most nonsensical."

He describes his atonement in his marriage with Jean Armour, in this language in a letter to the Roman Catholic Bishop Geddes:

"In that first concern, the conduct of man, there was ever but one side on which I was habitually blamable, and there I have secured myself in the way pointed out by nature and nature's God. I was sensible that, to so helpless a creature as a poor poet, a wife and family were encumbrances, which a species of prudence would bid him shun, but when the alternative was, being at eternal warfare with myself on account of habitual follies, to give them no worse name, which no general example, no licentious wit, no sophistical infidelity, would, to me, ever justify, I must have been a fool to have hesitated, and a madman to have made another choice. Besides, I had in "my Jean" a long and much-loved fellow-creature's happiness or misery among my hands—and who could trifle with such a deposit?"

In a letter to Mr. Macauley, of Dumbarton, concerning his home life he writes :

"As I am entered into the holy state of matrimony, I trust my face is turned completely Zion ward; And as it is a rule with all honest fellows to repeat no grievances, I hope that the little poetic licences of former days will of course fall under the oblivious influence of some good natured statute of celestial prescription. In my family devotion, which, like a good Presbyterian, I occasionally give to my household folks, I am extremely fond of the psalm, "Let not the errors of my youth," etc., and that other; "Lo! children are God's heritage," &c., in which last Mrs. Burns, who by the by has a glorious "wood-note wild," at either old song or psalmody, joins me with the pathos of Handel's 'Messiah.' "

He states his creed in a letter to Mrs. Dunlop, June 21, 1789:

"I have just heard Mr. Kirkpatrick preach a sermon. He is a man famous for his benevolence, and I revere him, but from such ideas of my Creator, good Lord, deliver me! Religion, my honoured friend, is surely a simple business, as it equally concerns the ignorant and the learned, the poor and the rich. That there is an incomprehensible great Being, to whom I owe my existence, and that He must be intimately acquainted with the operations and progress of the eternal machinery, and consequent outward deportment of this creature which He has made—these are, I think, self-evident propositions. That there is a real and eternal distinction between virtue and vice, and consequently, that I am an accountable creature; that, from the seeming nature of the human mind, as well as from the evident imperfection, nay, positive injustice, in the administration of affairs, both in the natural and moral worlds, there must be a retributive scene of existence beyond the grave, must, I think, be allowed by every one who will give himself a moment's reflection. I will go farther, and affirm that, from the sublimity, excellence, and purity of His doctrine and precepts, unparalleled by all the aggregated wisdom and learning of many preceding ages, though to *appearance*, He himself was the obscurest and most illiterate of our species—therefore Jesus Christ was from God."

He boldly judges himself in this letter in these words:

"Whatever mitigates the woes or increases the happiness of others, this is my criterion of goodness; and whatever

injures society at large or any individual in it, this is my measure of iniquity."

The next year he writes to Mr. Hill:

"God knows I am no saint; I have a whole host of follies and sins to answer for, but if I could, *and I believe I do it as far as I can*, I would wipe away all tears from all eyes."

His view of Life is expressed in the "Lines Written in Friars' Carse Hermitage, on the Banks of the Nith," June, 1783:

"Life is but a day at most,  
Sprung from night, in darkness lost;  
Day, how rapid in its flight—  
Day, how few must see the night;  
Hope not sunshine every hour,  
Fear not clouds will always lower.  
Happiness is but a name,  
Make content and ease thy aim;  
Ambition is a meteor gleam;  
Fame an idle, restless dream:  
Pleasures, insects on the wing,  
Round Peace, the tenderest flower of Spring!  
Those that sip the dew alone,  
Make the butterflies thy own;  
Those that would the bloom devour,  
Crush the locusts—save the flower,  
For the future be prepared,  
Guard whatever thou canst guard:  
But, thy utmost duly done,  
Welcome what thou canst not shun.  
Follies past give thou to air,  
Make their consequence thy care:  
Keep the name of man in mind,  
And dishonour not thy kind.  
Reverence with lowly heart  
Him whose wondrous work thou art;  
Keep His goodness still in view,  
Thy trust—and thy example, too."

It is doubtful whether he improved these lines by their second version five years later, 1788.



Burns' "Epistle to a Young Friend" (Andrew Aiken) is full of the soundest ethics, and should be committed to memory by every young man. As everything else it is autobiographical. Every stanza is rich. I quote only two:

"The sacred love o' weel-placed love,  
Luxuriantly indulge it;  
But never tempt the illicit rove,  
Though naething should divulge it:  
I waive the quantum o' the sin,  
The hazard of concealing;  
But, och! it hardens a' within,  
And petrifies the feeling!

When ranting round in Pleasure's ring,  
Religion may be blinded;  
Or if she gie a random sting,  
It may be little minded;  
But when on life we're tempest-driven,  
A conscience but a canker—  
A correspondence fix'd wi' Heaven  
Is sure a noble anchor!"

The distinctively Christian note is very faint in Burns. He has little to say about the world's Master of the Art of living. But there are many traces of the influence of Jesus Christ upon his thinking and ideals. Simple goodness, actual, not the theological fiction of imputed righteousness; the pity and mercy of God, that came in his hours of remorse and gloom, not the relentless judicial deity of Calvinism; the worth of every man, not the celestial value of an elect few which he heard proclaimed from the pulpit of the Old-Light; the brotherhood of men, not the distance between them illustrated by the Pharisaism he saw; these are lines of the teachings of Jesus that he felt over against the hard legalism preached in the orthodox kirk.

Burns treats seriously all religious matters. He is no less in earnest in his *Cotter's Saturday Night* than in the *Holy Fair*. His vitriolic words are never directed against the Bible, nor sane thinking in religion, nor



consistent Christian living. All these he glorifies. But he pierces every bubble blown by bombast. For him the body of divinity does not consist in the tomes of Calvinism studied by the theologians of his day, nor in the sermons so repugnant to his intellectual self-respect, but in any group of men and women who cannot think straight and walk crooked at the same time. He wanted a theology that differed from that on the mediaeval disk run into the eighteenth century pulpit victrola. The wave of intellectual sincerity that was part of the French Revolution no doubt sent its spray to Scotland. But Burns' own soul, that would nowhere screen itself, was ready for the moistening of the Gallic tide. It did not wash him from his moorings into infidelity. Had his personal life corresponded with his religious ideals he would have been Scotland's greatest religious reformer. Knox freed it from the spell of priestcraft. Burns would have freed it from the blight of dead orthodoxy. But his vices made him only a critic, not a constructive power. He unmasked hypocrisy. He plunged his keen rapier up to the hilt into caricatures of religion. He cartooned the theological parrots so that they became ridiculous. He was an expert in destruction. One can not help trying to imagine what effect his tremendous energy, confined to assault upon the weakness of the religion of his day, would have accomplished had he been equally strong in illustrating in his own character and life the positive constructive ideals he so nobly expressed. He believed in God, but God was not the controlling power in his life. He glorified the Bible, but did not incarnate its ethical and religious ideals. He wrote nobly of the life beyond the grave, but had no plan for his own life that extended beyond his tomb. All this so far as his writings and life show.

Yet we dare not judge him finally. Who is bold enough to limit the love of the Father that is exhaustless in its pity for those "who sin so oft have mourn'd, yet to temptation ran." Hear Burns' prayer:

"Oh, Thou great Governor of all below!  
If I may dare a lifted eye to Thee,  
Thy nod can make the tempest cease to blow,  
Or still the tumult of the raging sea;  
With that controlling power assist even me,  
Those headlong furious passions to confine,  
For all unfit I feel my powers to be,  
To rule their torrent in the allow'd line:  
Oh, aid me with Thy help, Omnipotence Divine."

The bitter tooth of remorse lacerated his soul. But excesses had weakened his will. His self-control shrivelled. He stands before us as almost a classic example of a perpetual struggle between virtue and passion, a continuous moving picture show of the strife between a mind whose ethical ideals are evermore growing and clarifying, and a body diseased and unable to resist its habits, a human tennis ball flying back and forth between the divine and the diabolical. He wrote as he lived, not from ambition but from feeling. All he wrote and did was a sample of himself. He was evermore autobiographical. We can do no better than to quote from the epitaph he wrote for himself ten years before he died. When he wrote it he penned both history and prophecy:

"Is there a man, whose judgment clear,  
Can others teach the course to steer,  
Yet runs himself life's mad career  
Wild as the wave?  
Here pause—and, through the starting tear,  
Survey this grave.

The poor inhabitant below  
Was quick to learn, and wise to know,  
And keenly felt the friendly glow,  
And softer flame,  
But thoughtless follies laid him low,  
And stain'd his name!

Reader, attend—whether thy soul  
Soars fancy's flights beyond the pote,  
Or darkling grubs this earthly note,  
In low pursuit;  
Know, prudent, cautious self-control  
Is wisdom's root."

IN THE room of the Burns Club of St. Louis is the original of "Lines to Burns" by Chang Yow Tong. Of the varied collection of Burnsiana none is more prized. Chang Yow Tong was a highly cultivated member of the Chinese Imperial Commission. He wrote in 1904 "Human Progress as shown at the World's Fair in St. Louis," dedicating the volume of graceful verse "To Universal Peace." The opening of the Exposition drew from him "China's Message to Columbia." In sentiment and composition these were of no ordinary character, but in his "Lines to Burns" the poetic genius of Chang Yow Tong found its most notable expression; it flamed with the spirit of the bard. The inspiration of the "Lines" was the coming dedication of the replica of the Burns Cottage at the World's Fair; that ceremony was on the 24th of June, 1904, Bannockburn Battle day. The address of dedication was delivered by Sir Hugh Gilzean-Reid, president of the World's Press Parliament. Chang Yow Tong was one of the guests.

THESE "Lines to Burns," reproduced in facsimile of the Chinese poet's autographed copy, are treasured by Burns' Clubs in all parts of the world. They were sent on the one hundred and fifty-third anniversary with the greeting of the Burns Club of St. Louis to members of the Burns Federation. From Kilmarnock, Thomas Amos, honorary secretary of the Federation, wrote:

"I have been asked by the office bearers of the Federation to express to your club our gratitude for your kindness in sending such a unique greeting. I can assure you it has been much valued. From newspapers which I have received I see that excellent poem has been read at Burns Clubs in Scotland, England and Ireland. To me it is wonderful that an Oriental has so caught the spirit of Burns and has seen right into the heart of his teachings. At our great gathering in Glasgow in September, I read the poem to more than three hundred delegates from all parts of the United Kingdom and it was received with great applause. A tribute to our bard such as you have sent makes us feel that the wished for time "when man to man the world o'er shall brithers be for a' that" is nearer than we imagine."

## LINES TO BURNS

By Chang Yow Tong,  
Chinese Imperial Commissioner

Inspired by the Burns Cottage, World's Fair, 1904

O! kindred soul of humble birth,  
Divine, though of the lowly earth,  
Forgotten thou art not to-day,  
Nor yet neglected—here's thy bay!

Thy cottage-home, hid from the proud,  
Nor thought of by the vulgar crowd  
In thine own time, has claimed a place  
On which the world's eyes now gaze.

Nor changed its homely, rugged lines,  
Where closely crept thy tender vines;  
But men have changed: nor yet deplore—  
Where once they spurned we now adore.

Thy life and work and destiny  
Contain a meaning deep for me;—  
Though fame be darkened by a fate,  
The laurel-wreath comes soon or late.

Thy splendid fame shall ever rise  
With undimm'd glory o'er the skies;—  
To struggling souls a hope shall yield  
On sailing seas and ploughing field.

I am a foreign, unknown bard,  
Whose devious course is rough and hard;  
But cheered at times by thy sweet song,  
I sing away, nor mind the throng.

Like thee, I'll toil with manly hand,  
Like thee, by manhood ever stand;  
And, guided by thy spirit brave,  
Shall wait for verdict at the grave.

MIDWAY in a mile of St. Louis culture stands the quaint Artists' Guild. This mile begins with the monumental entrances of Westmoreland and Portland Places, through which are vistas of parking between double drives bordered by mansions. Then come towering apartment houses of the highest class. A few steps farther, on the left are the great gateways of Kingsbury Place and Washington Terrace, while eastward Westminster and Washington Boulevards seemingly narrow in the distance to lanes with overhanging trees. Beyond is a group of churches, varied in architecture and creed—Presbyterian, Christian, Unitarian, Congregational and Episcopalian. Sandwiched between two of them is the club house and art gallery of the Artists' Guild, the home of the Burns Club and of the Franklin Club. In close alignment are the Soldan High School and the William Clark Grammar School, latest and best of public school architecture and equipment in the country. Clustered opposite and in the immediate vicinity are the Smith Academy and the Manual Training School of Washington University and two of the academies of the Catholic sisterhoods—Visitation and St. Philomena. Windermere and Cabanne Places, with their fine residences, are laterals. Cabanne Library, the Model Police Station and the great St. Ann Asylum complete this mile of St. Louis culture. Well-named Union Avenue! What a fitting center for a shrine to Robert Burns!





ROOM OF THE BURNS CLUB OF ST. LOUIS



The Burns Club of St. Louis is rich in Burnsiana. Among the relics which furnish the unique club room are a table which was owned by Burns when he lived at Dumfries, a table from the Tam O'Shanter inn, a third table made of wood from St. Michael's church at Dumfries, a little chair which was the favorite seat of Burns in his childhood, another chair from the cottage in Ayr and the old arm chair of Mrs. Tam O'Shanter,

Where sits our sulky, sullen dame,  
Gathering her brows like gathering storm.  
Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.

The great chimney and fireplace at one end of the long club room provide the ingle-nook which is occupied by an old spinning wheel and reel of the Armour family. On the opposite side is the "dresser" or sideboard with an array of the Club's tableware—quaint bowls and plates and ashets.

Upon the mantel, over the fireplace, are candlesticks of Burns' time, and near by hang "Bonnie Jean's" iron holder and the "girdle" on which the cakes were baked. "Bonnie Jean's" milking stool, a cupboard and table which belonged to a family where Burns visited much, a chair that was used often by the poet, and the eight-day clock one hundred and thirty years old give atmosphere to this home of the Burns Club of St. Louis.

The walls of the chamber are hung with reminders of Burns. There are the original drawings made by John Burnet to illustrate Tam O'Shanter, an oil painting of the Burns Cottage at the World's Fair, facsimiles of many of the best known poems of Burns in his handwriting, prints and sketches of Scottish scenes made familiar by the poet.

No St. Louis Night wi' Burns passes without additions to this priceless collection of Burnsiana.

ST. LOUIS was the first city outside of the British Isles to dedicate a permanent memorial in marble to Robert Burns. On the 9th of June, 1866, a life size bust of Burns was unveiled with fitting ceremonies in the Mercantile Library. It was the work of the sculptor, William Brodie, R. S. A. The bust stands on a mahogany pedestal in which are panel scenes from *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, *Tam O'Shanter* and *Auld Brig o' Doon*. This memorial was presented to the Mercantile Library by the Caledonian Society of St. Louis. Fourteen years after St. Louis had paid tribute to Burns, a memorial was unveiled in New York City. Other American cities have since honored the poet in a similar manner. At the St. Louis World's Fair was erected the first replica of the cottage in which Burns was born. The cottage was taken to the Lewis and Clark Exposition at Portland. Prompted by the great interest shown in the "auld clay biggin'," other cities have erected reproductions of the Burns cottage.

# TO ROBERT BURNS

By Orrick Johns

Read at the meeting of the Burns Club of St. Louis, on the  
anniversary of the poet's birth, January 25, 1913

Burns, your name is on the tongue  
Of the multitude to-day,  
But the world you knew when young  
Goes upon her wonted way.

Like a painted hoyden, she  
Gives her love where gold is plenty;  
Nor has changed a jot or tittle  
Since your years were two-and-twenty.

Burns, from cot and hovel now,  
Haply poets are upspringing,  
But the world would not allow  
They are any good for singing.

They will rhyme and love and labor  
As you did by Dumfries town,  
Hate the Kirk and curse the neighbor,  
Call the wrath of Heaven down

On the unco guid, and lordly—  
Fight the plucky, worldly fight;  
And at bottom find a healthy  
Streak of sacred human light!

That's what you, man, long were doing  
Far on Scotland's bonny moors,  
Living hard and lightly wooing,  
Learning meanwhile what endures.

Your good neighbors, maids and men,  
Took you for an idle devil,  
Loved you somewhat now and then,  
Kicked you oft, to make it level.

And you railed and scorned and scoffed  
Out of woe and passion pouring  
Words that wing the heart aloft  
Like the lark at daybreak soaring,

Ah, then, what the devil, Burns!  
Though the poet be untended,  
Though the town in worship turns  
To the fortunate and splendid—

Soon the word that's truly spoken  
Lodges in the common breast,  
Though by love and living broken  
He who spoke it is at rest!

Burns, shall we then try to change her,  
The world to poets stern and cruel?—  
Or wish them dauntless hearts in danger,  
To make their fires of starry fuel!

Damn it, man, the things that hurt you  
Healed you, for you bore them well;  
And if they found you short on virtue,  
Gad, you're singing sweet in Hell!

Aye, we know you're singing sweetly  
Though the Devil be your theme—  
Far from Doon and Kirk and Cotter,  
Lost in immemorial dream.

## BURNS, THE WORLD POET

By William Marion Reedy,  
Editor of *The Mirror*, St. Louis

January 25, 1912

**E**VEN before presenting my apologies for my poor effort of this evening, I would express my sincere thanks to this assemblage for, not alone the honor of its invitation, but for having coerced me into the performance of a duty that should have been done any time these thirty years. Until I was told by Mr. Dick, who seems for some time to have adopted me as his King Charles' head, so far as concerns this address, that I would be expected to say something to the Burns Club, I had never read the poems of Robert Burns. About thirty years ago, at college, I essayed the task and abandoned it. The dialect was too much for me—as I doubt not it has been for better men. I remember cherishing a theory, which, several times, I advanced to one of your most estimable members, Mr. Lehmann, in "wee short hours ayon't the twal," to the effect that Burns possessed an advantage over all other poets in that in his writing, when he could not find a rhyme in one language he took it from another, and so achieved a purely adventitious felicity through the mixture of the familiar and the strange. I do not know why I tell you this, unless it is because I am affected by that psychic wave of confession which has swept the country, beginning with the McNamaras, in Los Angeles, ranging east to Massachusetts and overcoming the poisoner of Avis Linnell of Hyannis, ricocheting thence to Washington and prompting Henry Watterson to proclaim his sin that he had mistaken a schoolmaster for a statesman.

Of course I read about Burns; one could not well help it if one maintained even that remote relation to

literature implied in conducting a more or less literary paper. Even, I wrote about Burns from time to time with that fatal facility and felicity of half knowledge, or no knowledge, which enables the journalist, by means of tags and clichés and generalities, successfully to counterfeit omniscience. But, at the word of the Burns Club, I have read my Burns and for my continuing sin of many years, my punishment, involving yours, is here and now.

What shall I say of Burns to you gentlemen who know him by heart, who have enshrined him in your heart of heart, who have fondled that first edition in which his own hand and pen filled out for his friend Geddes the lacunae in the poems indicated by asterisks or dashes? I ask your pardon for trying to say anything; but the retribution of my long dereliction must be fulfilled.

It was not, at first, with me as with Keats, on first reading Chapman's "Homer"—no new planet swam into my ken. I found myself rather in the attitude of our all too nearly forgotten humorist, Bill Nye, when he first witnessed the play of "Hamlet"; it was very good, but it was too full of quotations. As the reading progressed and the marking of the passages, it was borne in upon me how great a poet was Burns by the number of his lines that have been practically absorbed into the language of the people. There they were, enough to make a biggish bibelot—passage after passage, so familiar that even I knew them. And often these passages were whole poems. Then was impressed upon me that Burns is a world-poet, the poet not only of the man in the street, but of the poet, and I stood like stout Balboa and all his men, viewing the Pacific in a mute surprise, "silent upon a peak of Darien." But now I rejoice that I dined late at that feast, that I came to it with some experience of sin and folly not unlike the poet's own.

The poet has told his life story in his song, and told it with a splendid simplicity, in the language of the Scots farmer and peasant. When he essays literary English, speaking generally, the magic, the glamour vanishes. What a life of copious content was that of Burns, from the hour when a "blast o' Januar' win' blew hansel in on Robin" to the last hour in which he passed away after an execration upon the agent, Mathew Penn, who was hounding him for a "damned haberdasher's" bill. Whatever he did with his life, he lived it—every hour of it. He came into the world the heir to a remote romantic tradition of sacrifice by his ancestors in the cause of the hapless, worthless, but fascinating Stuarts. His father was no peasant, but a farmer, strong-willed but not "hard," a man of some education, of a tendency decidedly generous and humane in religious matters, when we contrast it with the dour creed of the time and place. His mother was more emotional, more sympathetic and she possessed a wide knowledge of Scottish folk song, supplemented later by a still more encyclopaedic knowledge of that subject by an elderly neighbor, Jenny Davidson. Thus Burns came, splendidly dowered in head and heart, gifted with a grasp, a hunger for all of life. Good sense and sentiment, reason and passion, all his days, waged a mighty struggle in his heart. The push and the pull of these forces gave him the full swing of the pendulum—all the ecstasies of life, from rejoicing to regret. His spirit seized upon each detail of experience, warmed it, fashioned it into forms of perdurable beauty which still speak their message to all the children of men. Burns had the ink in his veins and as things moved his thought or his emotion he wrote them off. Life was the matter of his song.

Yet when a tale comes in my head,  
Or lassies gie my heart a screed,  
As whyles they're like to be my dead,  
    (O sad disease!)  
I kittle up my rustic reed:  
    It gies me ease.



Therefore, while I would not minimize the poet's woes, I would say that their very intensity made for their more perfect expression, in which, even as we, the poet himself found an exquisite delight of their communicableness. He suffered for his and our gain. His early days at the plough's tail, doing a man's work at fifteen, gave him touch with nature, a touch delicate or strong, as need was, sure, brief, direct, miraculously comprehensive when he imparts his thought to us. No great poet wastes so few words as Burns in giving us a thought or a picture and no poet's taste is truer at its multifarious best. The eye for nature never better justified itself than in such a poem as the elegy of "Matthew Henderson," the "Westlin Wind" or "Halloween," with their landscapes done in a few strokes, full of light and the sense of the goodliness of the world of sky and wood and wimpling water and the wee timorous beasties of the wild, the field and fold. As we read that long and painful iliad of the successive failures of the Burns farms, were not our hearts light we should die, for pity of it, did we not remember that out of it all he drew a philosophy and a poetry full of "the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn, the love of love." He early knew his Bible history, his Pope, his Shakespeare, his Locke on the "Human Understanding," and he read Allan Ramsay's poems while he followed the plow, distinguishing the sincerity from the fustian, for Schoolmaster Murdoch had made him no mean critical vivisectionist. Song and sorrow were tenants of his heart in the economic tragedy of the farm at Mount Oliphant, but the rack-renting factor thereof wrought better than he knew, for out of his persecution and extortion sprang the poet's never-to-be suppressed sympathy for the House of Have-Not as against the House of Have, the first utterance of which we find in the "Twa Dogs," who are very dog of dog and yet searchers of the secrets of man's miseries high and low. After Mount Oliphant, Lochlea. Another poor farm; but if Lochlea

was unprofitable it was picturesque and Burns could steep his soul in scenery. He was now sixteen, he had been to dancing school and he was in love—and never after out of it. Poor he was, yet kings might have envied him the stuff of poetry and youth that was working in him, as, certainly, he never envied kings. After Lochlea, where the poet's father died, leaving so little that Burns and his brother had to claim their wages to get something to start life upon anew, after Burns' flax-weaving factory had burned to a Bacchic accompaniment, came the farm at Mossgiel. But Burns had studied life, as youth will, at Irvine and Kirkoswald; he had met with smugglers and sailors and roysterers; he had found the good fellows who are so bad for good fellows; drink and the doxies fascinated him, for his was the temperament that finds generous pleasure resistless. He was yet to find that

Pleasures are like poppies spread,  
You seize the flower, the bloom is shed;  
Or like the snow fa's in the river—  
A moment white then melts forever.

Much that was bad had Burns learned by this time, but one supreme good thing he learned; the goodness of so-called bad people; and the meanness or badness of self-styled good people came to him shortly after, to the dear delight of all the world and the more perfect confusion of Hypocrisy, for ever and ever, amen. It was at Kirkoswald he was refused by Mary Morison, who thought herself too good for him—and she but a serving girl. This was not an incident calculated to sweeten the poet's disposition, but long after, remembering, he forgave her and avenged himself nobly in a song in which her name is still sweet in the mouths of men. Mossgiel yielded two bad crops, but at Mossgiel Burns began to write, and the poetry crop was goldenly rich and the landlord could take no toll of that in unearned increment. In this time, sore beset with trial, harassed by apparent failure, the plowman

gave us "Halloween," "To a Mouse," "The Cotter's Saturday Night," "The Address to the De'il," "The Jolly Beggars," "The Farmer's Salutation," "The Twa Dogs," "The Death of Dr. Hornbook," "The Mountain Daisy." What a sweep, what a reach, what a revel of perception, of wit, of tenderness, of humor, of kindness, of satire and grotesquerie! This alone would have set up an ordinary poet in immortality. And Burns knew he was a poet by this time, and felt the spirit of consecration upon him; he made now his high resolve to do something for "puir auld Scotland"—"to sing a song at least." These poems passed from hand to hand, over the countryside, and never before was such verse so circulated since certain "sugar'd sonnets" of Shakespeare's among his friends. They were composed at the plow, and then, after the "countra wark," were written out, on a plain deal table, in an ill lighted garret—an humble workshop to which to-day the world repairs as to one of humanity's holy places. And all the better was this flash of singing for that through the meditations at the plow there flitted the face and form and echoes of the voice of Jean Armour.

Was ever true poetry written without a woman as part, if not all, the inspiration? I believe not. The great work of the world, in all lines, is usually done for, and to, an audience of one—a woman, though not necessarily throughout each work the same woman. A curious story that of Jean Armour, and in it Burns does not always figure well; he wrote some things about her that are infamous, though not more infamous than things he wrote later about Mrs. Riddle, whom he had offended. But she stung him into song. She and her father's treatment of him contributed to the sentiment of the "Mouse" and the "Daisy" a finer strain of wistfulness and gave to the satires an added biting power. The affair between Jean and Rob became a scandal; it broke into the kirk; it helped Burns to espouse the liberal cause the more heartily in the war

between the New-Light and Auld-Light clergy. A sordid enough story we should call it now, but it was not such then and there, when and where people were much nearer the earth than we, though no less earthy, Jean was not to blame, or if she was, Burns forgave her afterwards and gave up what must have been a fascinating dream to him—marriage with the clever and affectionate Clarinda, Mrs. McLehose, when she should have secured a divorce—and “made a decent woman of her,” in a re-birth of affection.

Passionately Burns threw himself into the battle for the New-Lights. They represented liberality. They were not strict constructionists of the Mosaic law. They looked leniently upon life. They did not frown at fun. They were in modified revolt against that terrible Calvinism, which could never have been bearable in Scotland, save for whiskey. The iron theocracy was mitigated only by intoxication. The Auld-Lights brought Burns' friend Gavin Hamilton to book for some breach of discipline; there was a trial; Hamilton came off triumphant and Burns burst forth in satire—“Holy Willie's Prayer,” “The Twa Herds,” “The Holy Fair,” “The Address to the Unco Guid.” And satire never burned deeper—not even the satire of Voltaire. Hypocrisy has been the target of almost all of the great poets at one time or another, but Burns has given us the incarnation of Hypocrisy perfectly and completely scarified for all time.

Here were sweet and bitter from the same wondrous well of genius. How may one do more than merely allude to the sweetness, the humanity, the rich, broad humor, the keen clear observation, the richness and yet succinctness, the kindness even to dumb animals, the good word even for the De'il, the philosophy, the grotesquerie of the poems first named. It cannot be told save in quotation and to tell a tithe of it one would have to quote all night.

"The Cotter's Saturday Night" is the wide world idyl of home—the sanest poem of all poems ever writ, for Burns poured into it all the blessed memory of his own home. It is a picture of poverty, but oh, what a richness there beyond all wealth of Ormus and of Ind. It is the very ideal of home, the English word for which the other languages have no exact equivalent. "Halloween" is a poem that is steeped in life at play over the mystery of love. Its humor is such that you cut it and it bleeds laughter exactly like that which rings in ears of memory from our own hay-rides and husking bees of the years which the locust hath eaten.

"The Mouse," the "Daisy," later the Hare, auld Mailie, the pet yowe, the mare, the birds, the cattle, even the foxes in winter—truly, as one has said, here Burns is not second to him of Assisi in love for his little brothers, the beasts and plants, the very humblest of God's creatures. And the lesson he learned from a louse on a lady's bonnet is more worth to the world, I do believe, than the one Newton drew, of the ache of sphere for sphere, from the impact of an apple on his nose. Read "The Jolly Beggars" to-day and then turn to our modern realists—Gorki for example. The one is human, the other diabolic. The Beggars are all poets at least, wicked though they be. They have hearts. They have laughter of this world, not like that of dead men in hell. They are lovable, not horrible. And that poem is palpitant with dramatic power. I am not sure that "The Twa Dags" are not vastly more doggy than Jack London's. They are as much true beasts as those in Kipling's jungle. They talk good sense, good economics, and, in a sense, good will, for the whole dialogue shows us that the social system does not make for happiness anywhere. And their views are an unsurpassed commentary upon the land question. Upon the whole the debate is "a draw," with the verdict in favor of what a man is, not what he has. Rich man not less than poor man is caught and ground and soul-spoiled

and soiled in the gin of a system based upon one man's toll upon the labor of another.

Having scalded his enemies in vitriol, they pilloried him in the kirk, enforcing a public penance upon him and Jean, she in the role of *Hester Prynne* of the "Scarlet Letter;" the girl's father sets the law upon him and he is in hiding when the Kilmarnock edition of his poems appears. A copy of the volume is worth its weight in gold to-day. And it was printed to raise nine pounds sterling to enable the poet to get away to Jamaica. Off to the Indies he had been, too, but for a letter from Dr. Blacklock of Edinburgh. His passage was paid. And the urge was on him because of the death of a new love—Highland Mary. He had clean forgot his Jean, or remembered her only with bitterness. Though he married Jean later, he never forgot Mary Campbell and years after he voiced his memory in two songs that express for all men all lost loves for all times—the unapproachable ballad of dear dead woman.

Through Dr. Blacklock Burns went to Edinburgh. He was the lion, and at first he liked the lioning, but in a little time he began to eat his own heart, which is profitable to a poet, but not pleasing to the man. He was well received by Dugald Stewart, Lord Monboddo, Hugh Blair—lights of the Northern Athens, but all echoes, reflections rather, of greater men in London. Though they did not know it, Burns o'ertopped them all. One little, unnoticed boy met him, and that boy was destined to claim almost equal love and admiration with him from Scotland and the world. The boy was Walter Scott. But Burns felt the patronage of the big men of "Auld Reekie." He carried himself well, but he was not deceived as to his status and so he looked up his humble friends. In the taverns and in the Masonic lodge, breeding place of liberal thought, he was the leader. There were wit and wisdom and whiskey, and—women of course. Burns took his fling



at all things Tory, in Church as well as State. And feeling his own worth, he could even be jealous-angry at Glencairn, to whom he has left such a noble tribute of friendship, because that noble paid attention, in his presence, to some dunder-pate. There was need of money. There was talk of a new edition of the poems. Burns applied for a place in the Excise. In April, 1787, came the second edition of the poems, but the publisher, Creech, was poor pay. Back to Mossiel by way of the Border; and that excursion did him little good for it was well washed with liquor most of the way, and so, later, with his trip to the Highlands where he refreshed all his Jacobic traditions and gave them expression most inopportunist for a man looking for a place under the Hanoverians. But through it all he was brooding divine poesy.

Back to Edinburgh in the winter of 1787—and now neglected. More embittered than ever, though he got a settlement from Creech, he sent £180 to Gilbert, married Jean, boasted blithely, "I hae a wife o' my ain," and rented Ellisland, near Dumfries. Finally came the place in the Excise, at £50 a year. 'Tis good to know he was a poor Exciseman, that he passed the hint to many a dealer to have the stuff out of the way by the time he and the inspector came around. Only the "wife and weans" induced him to hold the job. He had to watch the farm and ride a wide circuit, and the farm—the farm did not pay. Burns, like all the rest of the world, worked for the landlord.

And all this time he was pouring forth a stream of song sufficient to drown a world in loveliness. He did it for love of love and Scotland. He would take no pay for the work. At Ellisland he wrote "Tam O'Shanter" in an ecstasy described by his wife—an ecstasy that continues to be catching 125 years after. The ride is the immortal ride of all rides. This is the high water mark of the Burns genius. It is swift and direct as an arrow. It is the climax of kindly caricature.



It is fun as sweet as it is broad. It is a great moral lesson, too, and driven home with a laughter more loving than that of Rabelais. Here is the best and the worst of drinking. The eldritch comic in this performance is unmatched in all literature. It is a great poem in this, that it promotes both toping and temperance. You can't properly read it and explicate its moral against drink and "cutty-sarks" without a swig or two of the blend of old Glenlivet or eke of Haig and Haig.

Ellisland failing, Burns went to Dumfries in the Excise. Life was gay—in a fashion—the primrose way was a way of withering primroses. Burns was exiled from the country, from nature. He was no townsman. He had a sharp tongue and he said things he shouldn't have said, at the taverns. He said things that sounded like treason to the loyal natives. He responded to a toast to Pitt with one "to George Washington, a better man." He sent to the library a copy of DeLolme's "British Construction" with a suggestion that it be "taken as a creed of British liberty—until we find a better." He wrote an ode in honor of Washington's birthday and, in "The Tree of Liberty" he approved strongly the guillotining Louis XVI. Burns was a Jacobite by romantic tradition, but he was a Republican by his reason. He thought he was a Republican at least, but what he really was, was democrat—a small d democrat.

Alexander Smith, an earlier Stevenson, says Burns was Jacobite from sentiment, radical from discontent. This is utterly to misread the man and the poet. He was Jacobite because he loved the lost cause, because the Stuarts were unfortunate, and misfortune never appealed to him in vain. But he was not discontented when he wrote the lines to the Mouse or those to the Daisy or to Auld Mailie or Maggie, or the Hare. All these poems breathe sympathy for every living thing. Every poem that Burns has written celebrates the common people and the common virtues; even if he praises

the nobility or gentry it is for that they share the common virtues with the honest poor. The democratic inspiration of Burns is not his discontent. Indeed he never was discontented in the sense that he was a malcontent. He did not hate the superior classes. He hated their vices and their assumptions. He did not see wherein they were superior. He did not see that they worked. They looked like parasites to him. For money he did not care himself, but only for love and light and friendship and honesty and song—evermore song. And such songs as he produced in the midst of worry, poverty, illness, many duties, no one ever produced before. He reeled them off for Johnson and for Thomson without asking a penny. It was a labor of love, it was done for Scotland. He was not original, some say. Granted; he took his own where he found it, but nothing he borrowed he did not improve, nothing he touched he did not adorn. Burns was a nature poet, without any "return" from the worship of false gods. He was before Wordsworth. Burns was the first voice in the world, almost, since Villon, who gave poetic speech to the thoughts of the common man, even of the outcast. Burns' "nature" was a natural nature, not the pasteboard pinchback nature of Jean Jacques Rousseau. Burns was no sheer sentimentalist. His nature work is never overdone. "The pathetic fallacy" had no hold upon him. Satirist that he was, like Voltaire, he had a vast common sense. His epistle to a young friend, and the one to Davie, are examples of this, and in the same category comes many another poem and song. Burns' judgments, upon himself and others, are always fair, when satire is not his aim, and his didactic verse is more detailed in its observation, more widely diffused in its applicability, and more deeply psychological than Polonius' advice to Laertes—for old Polonius is a bore, and Burns' preachments have always the salt of humor.

A sensible man and a democrat? "For a' that," is the answer. "The rank is but the guinea's stamp." A

loving man— a singer of the love of comrades in which he antedated our own Whitman.

But ye whom social pleasure charms  
Whose heart the tide o' kindness warms,  
Who hold your being on the terms  
"Each aid the others"  
Come to my bowl, come to my arms  
My friends, my brothers.

For thus the royal mandate ran  
When first the human race began  
The social, friendly, honest man  
What e'er he be;  
'Tis he fulfills great nature's plan,  
And none but he.

At Dumfries came the end, July 21st, 1796. He died pestered by collectors, begging a few pounds for which he promised the worth in songs. He died worn out by living. He had sung Scotland back to something like nationhood. He had sung the glories of honest manhood, as opposed to hereditary distinction. He had proclaimed the divinity of the common man and had given the world its most effective armory against bigotry, cant, hypocrisy and class separatism. He gave shibboleths to patriotic democracy in all lands. He left us love songs that ease the world's heartache, little simplicities and particularities and personalities of utterance that are universal in their scope and feeling. "John Anderson, My Jo," "Afton Water," "My Love is Like a Red Red Rose," "My Dearie." He has sung friendship even as he has sung love, matchlessly, to Glencairn, to Simpson, to Lapraik, to James Smith:

For me, I swear by sun and moon,  
And every star that blinks aboon,  
Ye've cost me twenty pair of shoon  
Just gaun to see you,  
And every other pair that's done,  
Mair ta'en I'm wi you.

Burns never attacked religion, nor worth of any kind. Indeed he had a passion for honesty. He believed in honesty in poetry. That is why, I believe, he has never written anything in literary English that compares with the things he has done in the Scotch dialect.

Gie me ae spark o' Nature's fire,  
That's a' the learning I desire,  
Then tho' I drudge thro' dub and mire,  
At plough or cart,  
My muse, though hamely in attire,  
May touch the heart.

His philosophy: It is faith in good works.

If happiness have not her seat  
And center in the breast,  
We may be wise or rich or great,  
We never can be blest.

And charity for all, even for the Devil! What a stroke of sublime pantheism is his declaration that the light that leads astray is light from heaven.

The poetry of Burns has become the thought-stuff of the world, wherever men care for the primal virtues, wherever they strive for liberty. His countrymen have carried his gospel abroad, wide as the waters be; and around the world, the doctrine of individual worth has made and is making headway; human rights rather than rank rights, or money rights are coming into wider and wider supremacy, and, insomuch as Robert Burns had such tremendous share in this it demonstrates the truth of Shelley's saying that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."

ON THE Burns Night of 1911, the Club recorded tribute to the memory of a late member, Joseph A. Graham, who had been one of the zealous, steadfast promoters of the Burns Cottage at the World's Fair:

"He was of that nature to which the gospel of Burns appealed strongly. He viewed men with the tolerance bred of a newspaper life. He loved dogs. We, of the Burns Club, recall fondly the charming personality of our late associate and we voice our tribute to his memory, borrowing the lines:

"Heav'n rest his saul, whare'er he be!

Is the wish o' many mae than me;

He had twa faults, or may be three,

Yet what remead?

Ae social, honest man want we

Tam Samson's dead."

AFTER the dinner of 1911, Professor J. L. Lowes, of the chair of English at Washington University, took the Burns Club to an unusual viewpoint of the poet's genius. He led his hearers back to the English poets of the eighteenth century. He described and illustrated the repressed, pent-up, tamed spirit of that period until its very smoldering presence seemed to fill the chamber. And then with sudden transition, he caused to burst forth, without bounds, the soulful flame of Burns.

The honor guest of the Club upon this Burns Night was David Franklin Houston, chancellor of Washington University, later Secretary of Agriculture in the Cabinet of President Woodrow Wilson.

# BURNS AND ENGLISH POETRY

By John Livingston Lowes,  
Professor of English, Washington University

January 28, 1911

NO ONE but a Scotchman born has any right to speak of Burns before a Burns Club, and I, alas! am not a Scotchman born. It is true that one of my remote grandmothers was named Janet Adair, and that an ancestor of my own name lies buried, for some inscrutable reason, in Holyrood Chapel. But another grandmother bore the name of Anne West, and still another was christened in unspellable Holland Dutch, so that I fear there is a blending of blood which excludes me from the magic circle of those who call Burns countryman. Moreover, Burns is like Shakespeare, in that everything about him has been already said, and most of it said finally. To attempt to add a note to the chorus of praise with which for a century he has been greeted would be "to paint the lily, and add another hue unto the rainbow." My only salvation (and that for the time being is yours, too) lies in approaching Burns from outside; and what I wish, with your permission, to do very briefly this evening, is to consider something of what Burns brought into the great current of English poetry.

Burns appeared at the beginning of a reaction against a reaction. The century to whose close he belonged had swung far enough away from the traits and qualities which had characterized the great age that had preceded it. Few periods have been so keenly alive, so virile and red-blooded, so brilliantly varied in their interests and activities as that of Elizabeth. There was a zest in living that expressed itself in a superb spontaneity, a careless audacity, an unconsidered lavishness, both in life and in

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This address was delivered extempore, and, as it stands, has been dictated from scanty notes. It is printed here, not because the writer deems it in form or content worthy of such permanence—for he does not; but because the Burns Club has asked that it be done.—J. L. L.



letters, which it would be hard to parallel elsewhere. There was the stir of great movements in the air. The influence of the Renaissance, sweeping up through France and Spain from Italy—"that great limbec of working brains," as old James Howell afterwards called it—had reached England. The voyages to the New World and the daring exploits of men who (in the phrase which embodies the very spirit of the Elizabethan voyagers) "made a wild dedication of themselves, To unpath'd waters, undream'd shores"—all this had powerfully stimulated men's imagination. The menace of Spain was making possible such patriotism as burns in old Gaunt's dying words:

This happy breed of men, this little world,  
This precious stone set in the silver sea . . .  
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England . . .  
This land of such dear souls, this dear, dear land . . .  
England, bound in with the triumphant sea.

In a word, men were living deeply, broadly, keenly, and the literature reflected that depth and breadth and vividness. It reflected it in the richness and searching veracity with which almost every phase of human passion was depicted; it reflected it in the unfettered freedom of form that characterized the literature from the briefest lyric to a tragedy like *Lear*; and it was couched in a diction which was often like the large utterance of the early gods.

Then gradually the pendulum began to swing the other way. This is no place to enter into the reasons for the change. The change came, and it is what it carried with it that concerns us here. I am not one of those who decry the eighteenth century. That much maligned period had its own contribution to make, and it made it in its own dispassionate and businesslike way. But its needle pointed to the other pole, and its ideals were in large degree opposed to those of the spacious days that had preceded it. And nowhere was this more strikingly true than in its poetry. If, then, you will permit me to be concrete, I should like to suggest a few things that may help to set in clearer light the real significance of Robert Burns.

In the first place, one fundamental article of the eighteenth century poetical code was the repression of passion. Here, for example, are a few passages taken wholly at random from the poets of the period, which will illustrate what I mean:

Let all be hushed, each softest motion cease,  
Be every loud tumultous thought at peace.

That happens to be from Congreve's lines, *On Miss Arabella Hunt Singing*. Again, in Parnell:

When thus she spake—Go rule thy will,  
Bid thy wild passions all be still.

Doctor Johnson, too, strikes the same note:

Pour forth thy fervors for a healthful mind,  
Obedient passions, and a will resigned.

Not otherwise writes Whitehead, in a poem called (of all things!) *The Enthusiast*:

The tyrant passions all subside,  
Fear, anger, pity, shame and pride  
No more my bosom move.

I shall add without comment a few more examples:

At helm I make my reason sit,  
My crew of passions all submit (Green);  
Content me with an humble shade,  
My passions tamed, my wishes laid (Dyer);  
And through the mists of passion and of sense  
To hold his course unfaltering (Akenside);  
.....the virtuous man  
Who keeps his tempered mind serene and pure,  
And every jarring passion aptly harmonized  
(Thompson).

These are perfectly typical examples of the attitude of the times. And it is, of, course, a sound enough attitude ethically, too. But that is not the point. The point

is simply this. Suppose Lear and Hamlet and Othello and Macbeth, suppose Oedipus and Tristram and Launcelot and Faust had possessed "obedient passions and will resigned!" The question answers itself. No! with all its praiseworthy efforts to see things as they are, the eighteenth century shut its eyes to one of the most fundamental facts of all—to those deep-rooted and elemental impulses whose clash and often tragic struggle purge and uplift through pity and fear. Clever and often masterly as its craftsmanship was; clear-eyed and shrewd and sane as many of its judgments were, the period hermetically sealed itself against the great winds of the spirit.

But that was not all. Not only was the range of human interest notably restricted, but the splendid freedom of poetic form that had characterized the earlier days was gone as well. Upon that superb creature, the spirit of English poetry, there was imposed the strait-jacket of what was virtually a single meter; the thing was cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in, by the limits of the decasyllabic couplet. Now one may grant at once that to certain purposes no instrument could be more exquisitely adapted than the heroic couplet. But, as in so many instances, the difficulty lay not in the use, but in the abuse of the medium; and a measure which fits an epigram like a glove is not for that reason necessarily adapted to voice the poignant outcry of a tortured soul. But, after all, precisely one trouble with the eighteenth century was the fact that it *didn't* greatly vex its soul; and one result of its coolly rationalistic attitude toward life, coupled with the influence of the amazing craftsmanship of Pope, was a devastating monotony of heroic couplets, which spread over English poetry like a flood, with only the tip of an occasional Ararat projecting above the waves. I know I am painting in too broad lines, in too high lights, but this is after dinner, and I am, I think, telling the essential truth.

But still another count has to be added to the indictment. For no less fatal than the relentless vogue of the couplet was the prevalence of a so-called "poetic diction."

The age revelled in conventional stock terms for things. To call a spade by its proper name was like presenting oneself in company *in puris naturalibus*. It is all very like Bottom and Snout and the lion in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*. "To bring in a lion," says Bottom, "To bring in—God shield us!—a lion among ladies is a most dreadful thing; for there is not a more fearful wild fowl than your lion living." "Therefore," says Snout, "another prologue must tell that he is *not* a lion." And so, for the benefit of artistic sensibilities, in the poetry we are considering, the lions roar as gently as any sucking doves. The wind is softened to "the trembling zephyr" or "the fragrant gale." Shakespeare's "Cradle of the rude imperious surge" becomes "the sprightly flood," or "swelling tide"; a boot is "the shining leather that encased the limb"; a pipe is "the short tube that fumes beneath the nose." Does one make coffee? Then, "From silver spouts the grateful liquors glide, And China's earth receives the smoking tide." Does one stab? Why then, one "with steel invades the life." In a word, the poetry of the eighteenth century was doomed to go in periwig and small clothes; the superb forthrightness and directness and poignancy of the virile speech of deep feeling or compelling passion was to it an unknown tongue.

And in upon all that formalism and convention and repression came Robert Burns—"Neither eighteenth century nor nineteenth century" (as Arthur Symonds put it a year or so ago); "neither local nor temporary, but *the very flame of man*, speaking as a man has only once or twice spoken in the world." And now, perhaps, we may see more clearly some elements of his significance.

"*The very flame of man*"—that puts the essential thing, I think, as well, perhaps, as words after all can express it. For what one thinks of first in Burns' work is its throbbing, pulsing life, which fuses at white heat whatever inert stuff comes into his alembic. The eighteenth century was interested, in its cold methodical way, in *abstract truth*. Burns' passion for *reality*, for the *true*

thing, was like a consuming fire, and *Holy Willie's Prayer*, and the *Address to the Deil*, and the *Address to the Unco Guid* in their trenchant lines strip sham and hypocrisy stark naked, and leave them shivering. The eighteenth century had its theories, pleasing enough, about *the rights of man*. Burns did what Wordsworth rightly insisted every true poet must do—he “carried the thing alive into the heart by passion,” and “A man’s a man for a’ that”—and I should even say *The Jolly Beggars*, too,—is worth all the volumes of abstract theorizing that preceded it. The eighteenth century took little stock in *nature*. That line in *The Rape of the Lock*—“Sol through white curtains shot a timorous ray”—has always seemed to me rather engagingly symbolic of the whole period; it loved to look at nature, when it looked at all, through curtained windows, and the couplet was quite large enough for what it saw. But to Burns the world of nature, animate and inanimate, and the world of human life were bone of one bone and flesh of one flesh. There could scarcely be two men more essentially unlike at most points than St. Francis of Assissi and Robert Burns, yet at one point there is an almost startling kinship between the two. Some of you will recall St. Francis’s wonderful Cantic of the Sun:

“Praised be my Lord God with all his creatures; and especially *our brother the sun*, who brings us the day, and who brings us the light; fair is he, and shining with a very great splendor: Oh Lord, he signifies us to Thee.

“Praised be my Lord for *our sister the moon*, and for the stars, the which he has set clear and lovely in heaven.

“Praised be my Lord for *our brother the wind*, and for air and clouds, calms and all weather, by the which thou upholdst in life all creatures.

“Praised be my Lord for *our sister water*, who is very serviceable to us, and humble, and precious, and clean.

“Praised be my Lord for *our brother fire*, through whom thou givest us light in the darkness; and he is bright, and pleasant, and very mighty and strong.”

It is that same vivid sense of the brotherhood of all things that are, that is Burns' authentic note:

Wee, sleekit, cow'rin, tim'rous beastie,  
O, what a panic's in thy breastie!  
Thou need na start awa sae hasty,  
Wi' bickering brattle!  
I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee,  
Wi' murd'ring prattle!

Thy wee bit housie, too, in ruin!  
Its silly wa's the win's are strewin!  
An' naething, now, to big a new ane,  
O' foggage green!  
An' bleak December's winds ensuin,  
Baith snell an' keen!

The eighteenth century was little disturbed by *love*. It could "die of a rose in aromatic pain"—but it died in an epigram! The passion that surged through the Elizabethan and Jacobean lyrics and plays had beat itself out; in Pope's hands even the tragic agony of Heloise and Abelard is softened into a mild regret; the theme is played on muted strings. Nobody sang in those days as when, in the great days before, "wild music burthened every bough." One doesn't *sing* satire and epigram and critique. But with Burns human passion came again to its own. For, strange as it is, it is no less true, that it isn't what men *think*, but what they *feel* that lasts. What Thales and all the Seven Sages thought out "mit Mühe und Not" is as obsolete as the implements forged by Tubal Cain, while Sapho's handful of mutilated, fragmentary lines that have survived are contemporary with Shelley and with Poe. And in Burns this same elemental human note makes itself heard again. Imagine Dryden or Pope or Doctor Johnson, or even Goldsmith or Gray or Cowper writing:

"O, my love's like a red, red rose,  
That's newly sprung in June!"

And that brings us to another thing.



New wine won't go into old bottles—and here, emphatically, was new wine. What was to happen? Well, that happened which has happened again and again. It happened when, with only the measured, balanced cadences of classical prosody to express it, there came into the world that passionate thing—for that certainly is what it was—that found its most marvelous expression in the close of the eighth chapter of the letter to the Romans. Could *that* find room in the stately, serene hexameters of Virgil, or in the graceful stanzas of the Horatian ode? It couldn't, and it didn't; it beat its own music out, and we have, as the result of it, the poignant, plangent measures of the Latin hymns. The new and deeper passion had forged for itself a new and marvelous measure, that has influenced the poets ever since. Could Beethoven's stormy and tragic meaning cramp itself within the conventional rondo of Hayden or even Mozart? Play one of these, and then listen to the scherzos—the same fundamental form, but *quam mutatus ab illo!*—the scherzos of the great symphonies, with their rollicking gayety, grim mystery, and tragic portent. And so, when Burns appeared, the day of the heroic couplet was done—done because the winged, flame-like thing he brought could not be caged within it, any more than Lear's ravings, or the sea-music of *Pericles*, or the something rich and strange of the *Tempest* could be put in Shakespeare's earlier blank verse.

And as he brought freedom of rhythm once more, so with him came back again to English poetry a diction, fresh and masculine and vigorous. "Paul's words," said Luther, "are alive: they have hands and feet; if you cut them they bleed." And Burns' words are no less alive, and they are besides racy with the tang of the soil. They are like the speech that Montaigne loved: "It is a natural, simple and unaffected speech that I love," wrote Montaigne, "so written as it is spoken, and such upon the paper as it is in the mouth, a pithie, sinnowie, full, strong, compendious and material speech." And with *Tam*



*O'Shanter*, far more than with Wordsworth's amiable experiments, the reign of the old poetic diction was at an end.

"The very flame of man speaking as a man has only spoken once or twice in the world"—that *was* Robert Burns. And this authentic speech of his proclaimed for English poetry the dawn of a new day.

## TO THE BARD OF AULD LANG SYNE

By James Main Dixon, Litt. D., F. R. S. Edin.,  
Director of Oriental Studies and Professor of Literature,  
University of Southern California

Read at the meeting of the Burns Club of St. Louis, on the  
anniversary of the poet's birth, January 25, 1913

What tuneful bard of Auld Lang Syne  
Wi' Robbie can compare,  
Who sings the home of me and mine,  
The bonnie Banks of Ayr;

The daisy with its crimson tips  
That nestles 'mid the dew;  
The fragrant rose with ruddy lips,  
And thorns if love's untrue;

The laverock springing from the nest  
At the first peep of day,  
To wake the shepherd from his rest  
And singing soar away.

I stand beside the reapers strong  
Among the bearded bear.  
I hear the mavis' mellow song  
When eventide is near.

I see auld ruined castles gray  
Nod grimly to the moon,  
And Hornie waiting for his prey  
To fricht wi' eldritch croon;

And Alloway's auld haunted kirk  
Among the sheeted dead,  
Where witches foot it in the mirk  
By supple Nannie led.

The auld clay biggin's walls appear;  
And ben the hallan there,  
From a hush'd household group I hear  
The voice of evening prayer.

Hail to the bard who sings the praise  
Of Scots who fought and bled  
At Stirling Bridge and Loudon Braes  
With Wallace at their head;

And who at glorious Bannockburn,  
With Bruce sae bauld and slee,  
Made Edward like a coward turn  
And to the borders flee.

Rab's lines are like the burning gleed,  
They warm us, make us wiser;  
But may we better reck the rede  
Than ever did th' adviser!

From his wee sleekit mouse I take  
That word with wisdom fraught,  
The best constructed plans we make  
Will often come to naught.

From him I get that noble rule—  
The man of upright mind  
Who scorns to palter and to snool  
Is king among mankind.

LIKE unto Isaiah, Judge Moses N. Sale compared Burns when the Club observed the 151st anniversary of the birth of the poet. He found in Burns the gift of tongues and of prophesy for men of every clime and all times. He drew parallels between the words of the ancient prophet in Israel and those of him who "scotched" the Pharisees, the "unco guid" of a later generation. He rebuked in scathing terms those who question the religious nature of Burns and who see in the "Cotter's Saturday Night" and other Burns poems of like nature only "recoil from excesses of the flesh." The straight-from-the-shoulder sentences of Judge Sale found quick-answering echo in standing vote of the Club, and in the first suggestion to print the volume of Burns Nights in St. Louis.

## BURNS, THE PROPHET

By Moses N. Sale,  
Late Judge of the Circuit Court of St. Louis

January 25, 1910

MY APOLOGY is due to the members of the club for reading from my manuscript on this occasion. I might tell you, and you would doubtless believe me, that the duties of office and a self-assumed obligation to a body of young men, anxious to improve themselves as lawyers, have not given me the time since I was notified by our secretary, of the part assigned to me on this occasion. These reasons would form a durable foundation for my apology, and they certainly bear the appearance of being solid. They seem to me to be apparently valid excuses for my not being able to deliver to you an extemporaneous address, conceived on the spur of the moment and inspired by the occasion itself after days of deliberation. These reasons, however, are apparent and not real. Stage fright, a form of nervousness, known to those learned in medical jargon as "amnesic aphasia"—the chief symptom of which is the inability on the part of the patient to call to mind the exact word he wants, although recognizing it and able to pronounce it when found or when suggested, this is the real reason for my putting on paper my thoughts concerning Scotland's greatest poet, and one of the world's great poets. I hope you will detect, concealed in that reason, my great respect for the members of the Burns Club.

Before entering, however, on the subject assigned to me, there is another matter which has long lain on my mind, and which has troubled me no little. I disavow sincerely and earnestly any desire to pose as a reformer or to act as a censor in matters of social etiquette; yet it strikes me that on occasions of this kind, chaos is substituted for cosmos. Like him whose birthday we celebrate this evening, I am ordinarily a sociable animal; I

enjoy the good things of life that so sparingly fall to my lot, but I find it beyond me altogether to be my natural self, I find it impossible to be sociable, to enjoy myself and to contribute my share to the enjoyment of others when I sit down to a table laden with good things to whet and satisfy the appetite, knowing all the while that the sword of Damocles hangs over my head ready to drop at the word of the presiding genius. Foreknowledge of coming events on those occasions aggravates every symptom of my disease; and I am, therefore, driven to the necessity of putting my words on paper in order to make myself intelligible. If I permit my dirt-self to enjoy the eating and drinking, I do so at the expense of my psychic-self. I always envied the man, who, knowing he was to be called upon after his dinner for a speech, could yet enjoy himself as fully and freely as if nothing direful was impending. I confess that on these occasions my bodily and my mental self get into a fracas, and I am unable to extricate the one from the other until I am on my way home, walking in the cool of the night air, when my mental-self reasserts its dominion, and I recall to mind the splendid speech I had intended to make, but forgot; and then I see all too clearly, what a glorious opportunity I missed of talking myself into local fame. This confession, publicly made, together with the slight pressure of official work, and my profound respect for the Burns Club, are my justification for reading my address.

I want to make the suggestion now to members of the Burns Club, that hereafter, at these annual commemorations, the order of business be so changed as to make it possible for the speakers to enjoy the dinner by giving them the opportunity of emptying themselves of their speeches, so as to make room for the dinner. Speeches first, dinner next.

May I not modestly ask, "What was I or my generation that I should get sic exaltation" as to be selected by the club for the honor of speaking to you of Robert Burns on the 151st anniversary of his birth? I am honored

beyond my meed. I have frequently spoken in terms of profound admiration of the work of Burns and of my deep sympathy with his short and wonderful career. I have thus spoken in the presence of some of my friends, who were so fortunate as to have been born in Scotland or descended from Scotch ancestors, and doubtless my talking in such presence is responsible for my plight tonight.

I cannot now recall when I first began to read Burns. Except in a general way I cannot now say what first attracted or drew me towards him. I do know what continues to draw me in that direction and what will hold me fast to him as a friend so long as life continues. I am not quite sure, but I am inclined to believe that his Ode to Poverty was the first of his minor poems which I read or heard read, and I was so charmed with its truth and earnestness that I began to read and study the poet. The Doric dialect of South Scotland, in which Burns wrote, only increased the charm of his writing for me. The more of him I read the more I wanted to read; the stronger grew my admiration as I read, and my love for him as an older brother, who suffered much, who endured poverty and hardship, and yet during his all too brief life set beacon lights along the path of human life, to warn his fellow men of the pit-falls into which he himself had so frequently fallen.

My slight knowledge of the German language made it easier for me to understand the Scotch dialect. I always found an exquisite pleasure in tracing the wandering of words from people to people, from language to language. History furnishes no stronger proof than language that the time was when man to man the world o'er were brothers. The poet says: "Go fetch to me a pint of wine, and fill it in a silver tassie." "Tassie" is the German "tasse," English "cup." In the song of Burns where the young lassie considers what she could best do with her auld man, the young wife complains that "he *hosts* and he *hirples*." "Hosts" is the German "Husten," to cough. You remember "That sark she coft for her wee Nannie."



"Coft" is the German "kaufen," to buy. I rede ye—rede, the German "rede"—English, speech or discourse. "May you better reck the rede than ever did the adviser." "Reck" is the German "rechen," which means to count or calculate. "Skaith," Scotch—for injury, is the German word "schade," ("The Deil he could no skaith thee") as the Scotch "blate" is the German "bloede";—"sicker"—secure;—"unsicker"—insecure—German sicher. "Geck"—(*"ye geck at me because I'm poor"*)—German gucken. The Cotter "*wales*" a portion of the big Ha' Bible, with judicious care—German Wählen—choose.

These are simply illustrations of what to me was an additional charm in the language of Burns. Burns has sung himself into the hearts of men and women the world over, and he will remain there enshrined until time is no more. Every great poet is a prophet. Burns was such.

"He smote the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips did he slay the wicked." He had a message to deliver. He expressed it throughout his poems in manifold ways.

In the ode to General Washington's birthday he expresses it thus:

"But come ye Sons of Liberty,  
Columbia's offspring, brave as free,  
In danger's hour still flaming in the van,  
Ye know, and dare maintain the Royalty of Man."

and again:

"Is there for honest poverty  
That hangs his head an' a' that  
The coward slave—we pass him by,  
We dare be poor for a' that!  
For a' that, an' a' that.  
Our toils obscure an' a' that,  
The rank is but the guinea's stamp,  
The man's the gowd for a' that."

The pith of sense and pride of worth, the genuine in man as against cant and hypocrisy, the false in man are the chief notes of his song. In a broad sense, he sang and

taught the worth of man; that life is worth the living, if lived worthily.

As his great countryman expresses it:

"To the ill-starred Burns was given the power of making man's life more venerable, but that of wisely guiding his own life was not given."

You may sing loud and you may sing long, but unless there is sweetness and truth—I should say the sweetness of truth—in the voice that sings, the louder you sing, the smaller will your audience become until it dwindles to the singer alone.

That Burns sang the truth sweetly, is not only demonstratable from his own writings, but is likewise proven by his constantly growing audience.

Commencing, as he did, with a few peasant listeners in his Ayrshire home, he had before his death an audience wide as the confines of the English language, which since his death has swollen into a loving and reverent audience, embracing the civilized world wherever an articulate tongue is spoken. His poems have been translated into German, French, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Danish, Hungarian, Swiss and even into Latin verse—aye, even into Russian; and who knows, but that the leaven of his cry for the royalty, the worth of man—as man, is today working in that semi-civilized country, teaching the Russian peasant that it is man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn, and that the pith of sense and pride of worth are higher rank than a belted knight.

In 1786 the first edition of his poems was published, known as "The Kilmarnock Edition." Every year since that memorable year, 1786, almost without exception, somewhere among the sons of men whom Burns so loved, some volume by Burns or concerning him has been published, and in some of those years many volumes were published, until now the bibliography of Burns, things written by and of him, in the various quarters of the globe, including only single copies of each edition of such publications, would constitute a library of more than one thousand volumes.

What does all this mean? It can have only one significance, and that is, that Burns had a world-wide message to deliver, which men were eager to hear, and for which the human soul hungered; that his message was true and came from the heart of one man to the hearts of his fellow-men, not only to his fellow-Scot, but to his fellow-man the world over.

If it could ever be said truthfully of any poet in any language, it must be said of Burns that he, indeed, "found tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything." Notwithstanding the truth of this assertion it may not be unbecoming in me to say, since the local press has been discussing a censorship of the stage, that our own beloved poet would have been put in the index *librorum prohibitorum* or at least in the index *expurgatorius* long, long ago, if orthodoxy had its way; and this is quite evident from a pamphlet published in 1811 entitled, "Burnsiana, addressed to real Christians of every denomination," by the Rev. William Peebles, and another pamphlet published in 1869, entitled "Should Christians commemorate the birthday of Robert Burns," by the Rev. Fergus Ferguson. I have never read, nor have I ever seen a copy of either of these oblivion-seeking publications; and the publications, except to the curious students of Burns, have dropped where they belong, into "the insatiate maw of oblivion"; but if there had been a censorship of the press in Burns' day, Burns would have been barred. The very names of Rev. Fergus Ferguson and the Rev. William Peebles sound strange to our ears, and except for the fact that each of these reverend gentlemen, *during a long and useful life*, wrote a monograph upon a subject connected with the name of Robert Burns, they would now be buried so deep in the bottomless pit of oblivion that the trumpet of the Angel Gabriel would not disturb their rest.

In 1859 a chronicle of the hundredth birthday of Burns was published at Edinburgh, containing an account of more than eight hundred meetings held in various parts

of the English-speaking world, together with the most important speeches delivered at such meetings. Here one hundred years after the birth of Burns was an answer to the Rev. Fergus Ferguson, an answer unanimously in the affirmative, that Christians—genuine Christians—not necessarily those who wear the garb of sanctity, should commemorate the birthday of Robert Burns; and in behalf of at least a portion of the non-Christian population of the universe, I affirm that the Jews should likewise commemorate the birthday of Robert Burns; Robert Burns was a prophet in Israel, and like a veritable prophet, he speaks to the genuine man of every clime and all times, to all those who answer in the affirmative, the questions, “Have we not all one Father?” “Hath not one God created us all?” Cunning and hypocrisy had invaded the Church of Scotland in Burns’ day, as they had churches in other days, and as they will continue to invade the church in yet other days. Burns had little patience with public censors—those who had “naught to do but mark and tell their neighbors’ faults and follies.” Every age is afflicted with the pestiferous censor—the man who wants to cut and determine for his supposed weaker brothers, the pattern of a moral life; unfortunately these pattern makers do little else than make patterns. Now, a pattern is in and of itself worthless, unless you fashion something useful by means of it. The iron-worker uses his mold, but you can’t use the mold or pattern for building a structure and if the iron-worker did no more than make patterns, he would live a very useless life. He must do something with his pattern, he must make articles of utility or of beauty, and if he did nothing more than stand idly by and criticise the work of others he is fulfilling not the purpose of the creator—who only criticised his own work, and that after it was completed and done— but he is following the example of old Horrie, Satan, Nick or Clootie, whatever his title may be—creating nothing, but always seeking “to scaud poor wretches.”

Burns scotched the Pharisees, the rigidly righteous of his day—the attendants at the solemn meetings—those,

who "for a pretence make long prayers," as did Isaiah his hypocritical contemporaries; as Jesus of Nazareth flayed the same everlasting species in his day. "The blind guides which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel;" "the hypocrites who pay their tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and omit the weightier matters of the law;" "those who do all their work for to be seen of men," "those who sit in the chief seats of the synagogues," who occupy the front pews of the churches—those, in short, who have "devotions' every grace, except the heart"—these, all these and their name is legion, were scourged by Burns with true prophetic fire—and these self-same Scribes and Pharisees are those who speak and write of Burns' irreligiousness. A brother prophet in Israel had sung:

*"The ox knoweth its owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know; my people doth not consider."*

*"Bring no more vain oblations," sang Isaiah. "Incense is an abomination unto me. The new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies (church meetings) I cannot endure. It is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moon and your appointed feasts my soul hateth. They are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when you spread forth your hands I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when you make many prayers I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood, wash ye! Make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; Cease to do evil; Learn to do well; Seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. The princes are rebellious and companions of thieves. Everyone loves gifts and followeth after rewards. (Just as the boodlers of our day.) They judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them."*

Thus sang the old Hebrew prophet. It is easily imaginable that if we had all that was written by some of the orthodox ministers, (some of the "unco guid") of and concerning Isaiah, there would be found among the lot one with the title page, "Should Israelites commemorate the birth-day of Isaiah?"

Burns might have written the foregoing quotation from Isaiah. He did write so many like it that the preachers in his day thought doubtless—as the priests did of

Isaiah, that Burns was irreligious. Many so-called critics of Burns attribute his attacks on the church to motives of personal rancor; but how little they understand the poet! The true poet sees the very soul of things. The rottenness was in the church, and it was this corruption, this humbug and hypocrisy within the church that stirred the ire of Burns as it stirred the soul of the ancient prophet under similar circumstances in the religion of Israel.

Burns had no patience with the new moon, the sabbath, the appointed feasts, the solemn meetings, and the many prayers uttered from the lips. They were to him as they were to Isaiah an abomination, because, in the language of Burns, these things were done:

“In all the pomp of method and of art,  
When men display to congregations wide,  
*Devotion's every grace, except the heart.*

He had no patience with such lip service, but that he was devoutly truly religious, his poems abundantly prove. No one can read “The Cotter’s Saturday Night,” which contains that beautiful description of religious life in the home of the poor peasant—his own father’s home—without feeling that Burns was essentially and truly religious.

In his epistle to the Rev. John McMath, he says:

“I gae mad at their grimaces.  
Their sigh’n, cantin’ grace-proud faces,  
Their three-mile prayers and half-mile graces.”

And in this same epistle he apostrophizes thus:

“All Hail, Religion, Maid Divine,  
Pardon a muse so mean as mine,  
Who in her rough, imperfect line,  
Thus dares to name thee;  
To stigmatize false friends of thine,  
Can ne’er defame thee.”

It seems to me quite obvious that Burns, like the earlier prophets, was fighting the devil and his imps, even though such imps were dressed in cloth and wore the livery of heaven. It seems to me that he was only proving



how truly religious he was when fighting and opposing, tooth and nail, as he always did, sham and cant, and those, as he puts it,

*"Who take Religion in their mouth, but never have it elsewhere."*

This seems so plain to me that it is hard for me, not wearing orthodoxy's hood, to understand how anyone could ever have questioned Burns' religious nature. If Burns had never known and felt the purity and holiness of religion, if he had never known religion in its reality, he could never have satirized its bastard offspring as he did in "The Holy Tulyie," "Holy Willie's Prayer," "The Holy Fair," and the address to the "Unco Guid." If his own religious feeling was not genuine, whence came his burning indignation at the "false sighin', cantin', grace-proud faces, three-mile prayers and half-mile graces."

Burns did not believe in the orthodox Hell, nor in the doctrine of eternal damnation as taught by the church ;

"The fear o' Hell's a hangman's whip,  
To haud the wretch in order,  
But where ye feel your Honor grip,  
Let that ay be your border."

I conclude by calling your attention to a scurvy screed written by Elbert Hubbard, a king among fakirs, who makes books for a living. The screed is one of his little journeys, entitled "Robert Burns." It should be entitled "Elbert Hubbard," for, it is evidently evolved from his inner consciousness, is not based on the life and work of Burns, and is so palpably an effort on the part of Hubbard to drag the gifted Burns down to his own level that the pamphlet is positively disgusting. It is so flattering to a small soul to find that Burns went a kennin wrang, but the poor fellow whose morals are so frayed and tattered, and whose vision is so blurred and dimmed as to be able to see in the "Cotter's Saturday Night" only a tip to t'other side, that is, the side of excess and vice, is, indeed, to be pitied. This poem, Hubbard says, was written after



a debauch, just as after a debauch a man might sign a pledge and swear off, and that this is true of all of Burns' religious poems. This great critic at East Aurora says that all of Burns' religious poems were simply a recoil from excesses of the flesh; and thus hath another self-appointed commentator on Burns damned himself out of his own mouth.

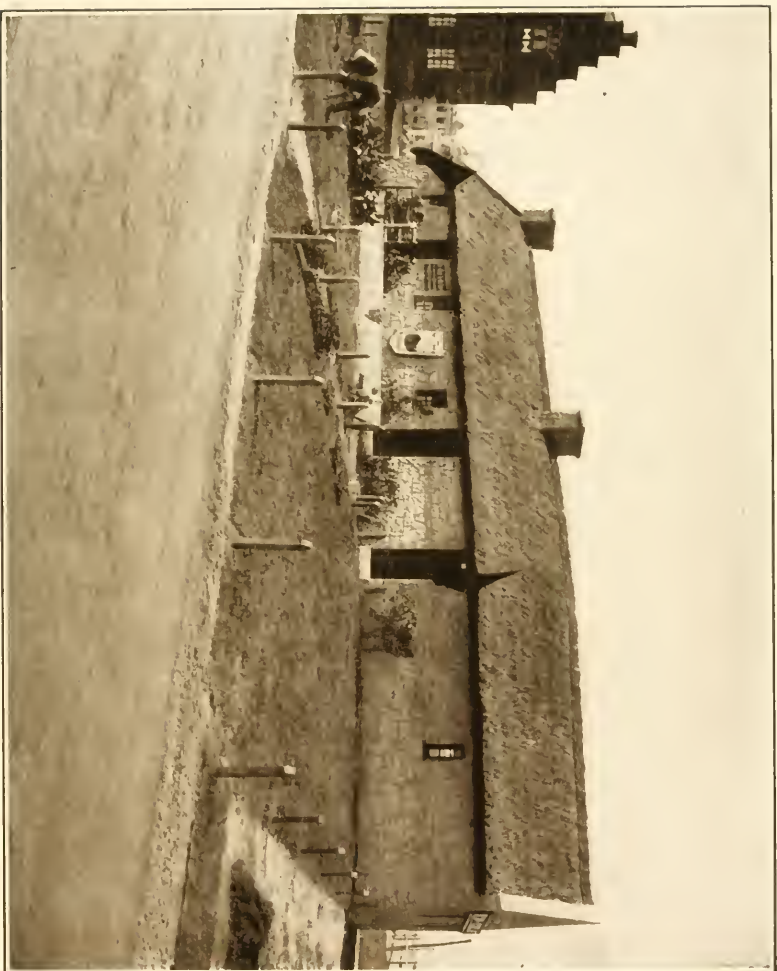
Burns has been criticised, his life and his life's work discussed by a number of the British essayists, including Lord Jeffrey, Christopher North, Thomas Carlyle and Robert Louis Stevenson; his work as a poet has been discussed by professors of universities, bearing all kinds of degrees, and it remains for this wise man at East Aurora, in the State of New York, to discover the real origin of Burns' greatness as a poet.

Christopher North, in his "Recreations," said of Burns:

"When he sings, it is like listening to a linnet in the broom, a blackbird in the brake, a laverock in the sky; they sing in the fullness of their joy, as nature teaches them; and so did he; and the man, woman or child, who is delighted not with such singing, be their virtues what they may, must never hope to be in Heaven."

And so I may well say of the man who in all seriousness writes and publishes in this day and generation that the "Cotter's Saturday Night" is the result of a debauch, he can never hope to escape Hell—he is already there.

SCOTTISH Day at the World's Fair was celebrated August 15, 1904, the anniversary of the birth of Sir Walter Scott. A company of Highlanders escorted other Scottish organizations of St. Louis through the grounds to the Burns Cottage where President David R. Francis extended a welcome in behalf of the Exposition management. W. R. Smith, curator of the Botanical Gardens at Washington, a lover of Burns, of international fame, responded. The Scottish flag was raised. Auld Lang Syne was sung. In the Hall of Congresses, the celebration was continued, with Joseph A. Graham presiding. A poem on Robert Burns, by Willis Leonard McClanahan, was read by Maye McCamish Hedrick. Ingersoll's tribute to "The Place Where Burns was Born" was read. Frederick W. Lehmann, a member of the Exposition board and chairman of the committee on International Congresses, later solicitor general of the United States, delivered the address.



BURNS COTTAGE AT THE WORLD'S FAIR, 1904



## BURNS OF THE "AULD CLAY BIGGIN"

By Frederick W. Lehmann

Scottish Day, August 15, 1904

AMONG the many structures which have been reared upon these grounds to illustrate the achievements, during a hundred years, of a free people in a free land, none has more rightful place than that which so faithfully represents the "auld clay biggin" in which Robert Burns was born. Called untimely from this life ere yet the language in which he wrote was heard here, though he himself had never set foot beyond the borders of his own country, the rich fruitage of his genius is none the less a part of the heritage of our people. Throughout the poetry of Burns breathes the spirit of our institutions, the Declaration of Independence, the Proclamation of Emancipation, and here we have endeavored to realize, as nearly as human effort may, the great truth that.

"The rank is but the guinea's stamp  
The man's the gowd for a' that."

The artificial verse of modern pessimism has given us a description of the "man with the hoe," which Burns would not have accepted as a portrait. When he wrote his "Cotter's Saturday Night," he drew his inspiration not from a foreign canvas, but from his own experience. The cotter he describes was his own father, and of the children who knelt at the ingleside to join in the worship of God, Robert was one. The cotter of Burns' inspiring and uplifting poem toiled as hard as ever did Markham's man with the hoe, but he was not a dull soulless clod; the light of intelligence was in his eye and the fervor of ambition was in his breast. He had been little at school, but he was an educated man. His books were few, but he read and re-read them until he made their learning and

wisdom his own. He had strong convictions concerning his position in the order of the universe, and his sense of nearness to God prevented his abasement in the sight of his fellowmen. As his life darkened to its close, the hope that he had for himself he retained for his children, and to the utmost of his ability he strove to fit them for whatever place they might be called to by duty or opportunity.

At five years of age Robert was sent to school at Alloway Mill, and later the father joined with four of his neighbors to hire a teacher for their children. These early years were well employed. Every moment that could be spared from work was spent in study. He read, not only his school books, but Shakespeare, the Spectator, Pope, Ramsay, and above all, a collection of old Scottish songs. "I pored over them," said he, "driving my cart, or walking to labor, song by song, verse by verse, carefully noting the true, tender or sublime, from affectation and fustian. I am convinced I owe to this practice much of my critic craft, such as it is." His mother was learned in the legends and ballads of her country, and she brightened the evenings of her humble home by recounting them to her children.

There was little variety in this life. It was strenuous in its labor and its study, and simple in its recreations. Its burdens were hard to be borne. This showed itself in the early stoop of the poet's shoulders, in his frequent sickness and moods of melancholy. But it was not always dark. He found a charm in the books he pored over so greedily, and a profound pleasure in the companionships which the work and the play of the countryside brought him.

Much has been written concerning his habits during the years of his early manhood, but the testimony of those who had the best opportunities for observation is that he was not a dissipated man. Indeed, his time must in the main have been well spent. His letters and his conversation showed him to be a man of culture, as surely as his poems showed him to be a man of genius. At the age of

twenty-seven, when the mode of his life had changed but little, and certainly not for the better, he went from his farm life in Ayrshire to spend a winter in Edinburgh with the highest fashion of that city, and he towered like Saul among his brethren in a company made up of men like Dugald Stewart and Hugh Blair. He was the center of attraction at every hospitable board, not as a spectacle of nine days' wonder, but as a companion of inspiring presence, not alone to set the table in a roar, but as a man learned among scholars and wise among sages. Into the gay assemblies of the city where the Duchess of Gordon held sway, he came as a gentleman, and the Duchess herself had to acknowledge that there was no resisting the charm and fascination of his manner. And yet what acquirements and accomplishments he had, he got from his farm life, and from that he got all the inspiration of his muse. In no spirit of mock humility did he tell the gentlemen of the Caledonia Hunt that the muse of his country found him at the plough tail. There she found him, and hardly ever seems she to have sought him elsewhere. It is wonderful how little impress his winter in Edinburgh made upon his verse. It may have led him to look a little more to smoothness and polish, but he got from it no inspiration.

The poet, we were told long ago, is born and not made. We look in vain into the birth and circumstances of the world's greatest children for an explanation of their genius. The unlettered Homer was the great bard of Greece. From among the humblest dwellers on the Avon came the master spirit of our drama, who made the passions of princes and the ambitions of kings the sport of his genius. And from a clay cot near the banks of the Doon the world has gotten its sweetest heritage of song.

Before Burns was fifteen years old, his powers displayed themselves. In the labors of the harvest his partner was a beautiful girl a year younger than himself, and she instilled in him, he tells us, "that delicious passion,



which in spite of acid disappointment, gin-horse prudence, and book-worm philosophy, I hold to be the first of human joys. . . . Among her love-inspiring qualities she sang sweetly; and it was her favorite reel to which I attempted giving an embodied vehicle in rhyme. . . . Thus with me began love and poetry."

To the gude-wife of Wauchope House he wrote in after years,

"When first among the yellow corn  
A man I reckoned was,  
An' wi' the lave ilk merry morn  
Could rank my rig and lass,  
.....  
E'en then a wish, I mind its power,  
O wish that to my latest hour  
Shall strongly heave my breast,  
That I for puir auld Scotland's sake  
Some useful plan or buik might make,  
Or sing a sang at least."

He wrote for years, but without publishing, and such currency as his poems had they got through the circulation of manuscript copies from hand to hand. His reputation grew throughout the countryside. While most of his verses were in praise of his fair friends, some of them were bitter lampoons and biting satires upon those he conceived to be his enemies, and so, while he was loved by some, he was feared and consequently hated by others. In the religious controversies between the Old Light and the New, he took a free part, and there was more than one to harbor resentment for his Holy Fair and Holy Willie's Prayer, and bide his time to indulge it.

Nor had they long to wait. Burns was soon involved in difficulties from which he saw no escape save in flight. He determined to quit Scotland and to try his fortune in the West Indies. To acquire the means of doing this, and to leave some remembrance of himself in his native land, he ventured upon a publication of his poems.

In June of 1786, he attended, as he believed, for the

last time, the meeting of the Masonic Lodge at Tarbolton, and taking his farewell of them he concluded.

"A last request permit me here,  
When yearly ye assemble a'  
One round, I ask it with a tear,  
To him, the bard, that's far awa."

Never was parting prayer more richly answered. The children and the children's children of those who met with him at Tarbolton have been gathered to their fathers, and still throughout all Scotland and in far distant places, wherever Scotia's sons and daughters have wandered, men and women yearly gather to pay the richest meed that genius can win,—the tribute of their affections to his memory.

Old Fletcher of Saltoun said that "if a man were permitted to make all the ballads, he need not care who should make the laws of a nation." Burns wrote the songs, not only of Scotland, but of every English speaking nation, of countries yet unpeopled when he wrote.

The Kilmarnock edition was published in 1786, when he was twenty-seven years old. The popularity of the book was great and instant, and yet he realized from it the meagre sum of twenty pounds, not much more than enough to pay his expected passage to Jamaica, and less than one-fifth of what would be paid for a single copy of it at the present time. It is not to be wondered at, that with such reward for such work, he was frequently embarrassed and often in despondent mood. He had an aversion to debt amounting to horror, and all his life he was fighting against it. People blamed his want of thrift and his habits of life; it might have served better to extend now and again a helping hand.

The reception with which the little volume met determined him to stay at home, and to publish a second edition of the book. The printer was willing to risk the expense of the printing, but he insisted on being guaranteed the cost of the paper; and for this the meagre profits of the first edition were altogether insufficient.

But now his fame was not confined to Ayrshire, and his ambitious hopes led him to the larger field of the capital. The friends he made there came to his assistance, and the subscriptions, led by the members of the Caledonian Hunt, gave assurance of success in advance. Five hundred pounds were the rewards of this venture, not secured, however, without great delay and difficulty, his money being doled out to him from time to time, months elapsing before he was able to get a final settlement with his publisher. Two hundred pounds he gave to his brother, who had undertaken the care of their mother, and the remainder he invested in the lease of a farm at Ellisland, the choice of the place being determined rather by the fancy of the poet than by the judgment of the farmer.

His improved circumstances on his return from Edinburgh overcame the objections which the parents of Jean Armour had made to him, and his marriage with her, irregularly contracted long before, was now publicly acknowledged and approved by the kirk.

But the farm was a failure, and the earnings of his literary labors were soon lost upon it, and, much against his will, he accepted a place in the excise at fifty pounds per year.

What he thought of this work we can guess from what he said:

“Searching auld wives barrels  
Och on the day!  
That clarty barm should stain my laurels;  
But—what’ll ye say?  
These movin’ things ca’d wives and weans,  
Wad move the very heart o’ stanes.”

But the best sentiment he expressed on the subject was to the mother of Glencairn, “I would much rather have it said that my profession borrowed credit from me, than that I borrowed credit from my profession.”

He left Ellisland, where he had tried in vain to combine the business of farmer and exciseman, and came to Dumfries. Of his life in this city there has been much

criticism. He undoubtedly partook sometimes too deeply of the pleasures of the social bowl, but in this he but shared the habits of his time. His companionship was sought by all the free spirits that gathered in the town, for there was none like "rautin', rovin' Robin" to make a night of mirth and merriment. But the reports of his conduct were greatly exaggerated, not only by his enemies, but by himself. In his periods of melancholy he was much given to self censure. No man ever acknowledged his faults more freely or more publicly, and if he had said less of his failings, less would have been thought of them. And much of the reproach against him was due to his political views and the freedom with which he expressed them. His heart responded to the rising spirit of independence in France, and it was not his nature to stifle his convictions. To be a revolutionist was to lose favor in the social realm, and Burns was passed unnoticed, because of his principles, by many who had small occasion to scorn him because of his habits.

His dependence upon his salary as exciseman irritated him and deepened his despondency. He longed for a competency that he might be independent; but from the beginning to the end fortune mocked his every thrifty endeavor.

His nature was too sensitive to be indifferent to the treatment he was receiving. A friend met him one day walking alone on the shady side of the street, while the opposite walk was gay with successive groups of gentlemen and ladies, not one of whom seemed willing to recognize the poet. The friend proposed to him to cross, but he answered, "Nay, nay, my young friend, that's all over now," and then quoted a verse from an old ballad.

"His bonnet stood ance fu' fair on his brow,  
His auld ane looked better than mony ane's new,  
But now he let's 't wear ony way it will hing,  
And casts himself dowie upon the corn bing."

And yet it was during his Dumfries residence that Burns wrote most of his songs. He had been gathering

old ballads, altering and adding to them for Johnson's Museum, besides contributing some of his own, when George Thomson entered upon his work of compiling Scottish melodies and having songs written for them by the best writers of the day. He applied to Burns for the help of his genius. Burns answered at once, promising his assistance, and redeemed his promise by contributing some sixty songs, among them the finest efforts of his lyric muse. And, poor as he was, he made it a labor of love. "As to remuneration," he wrote to Thomson, "you may think my songs above price or below price; but they shall be absolutely one or the other. In the honest enthusiasm with which I embark in your undertaking, to talk of money, wages, fee, hire, etc., would be downright prostitution of soul."

The man who could write songs like "Highland Mary," "Bannockburn," and "A Man's a Man for a' That," and make them, even when broken with disease and oppressed with poverty, a free gift to his country, is entitled to a charity in judgment broad enough to cover more sins than could ever be laid to Burns' charge.

Not until a few days before his death, when he knew that his end was near, and an importunate creditor was threatening him with a process that would cast him in jail, did he alter his purpose. He then wrote to Thomson for five pounds, for which he says, "I promise and engage to furnish you with five pounds' worth of the neatest song genius you have seen." With this letter he enclosed the lines of "Fairest Maid on Devon Banks." Thomson sent the money, the creditor was paid, and within a week Burns was dead.

"We pity the plumage, and forget the dying bird," cried Shelley, as the brilliant Sheridan lay deserted upon his deathbed. And so it was with Burns. There was a splendid funeral. All Dumfries marched in procession to his grave, and a great mausoleum was raised above it. And happily better than this, though late it came, his family received the substantial recognition of his labors that was denied to him.

When he passed away in the prime of his early manhood, his country awoke to the fact that he was the greatest of all her children. No man before, and no man since, has done so much to honor her name.

He gave to Scottish literature what until then it wanted, a national quality and character. Men of letters there were before. Hume and Robertson had written their histories, but for aught that appeared in them, they might have come from south of the Tweed. Stewart and Reid belong to schools rather than to a nation. Ramsay and Ferguson were not strong enough to make an impression beyond their own time. Before Burns, the Scottish tongue had not attained to the dignity of literary recognition. He chose it deliberately as the medium of his song, and it mastered him as much as he mastered it. Little of what he has written in pure English rises above the level of mediocrity, and it would not be possible to anglicize his Scottish verse without distinct impairment of its poetic quality.

The theme of his verse, like its garb, was Scotch. It was his country and her people, the country as he saw it, the people as he knew them. The scenes he describes are those with which he was familiar, the men and women his every day acquaintances. He never paraphrased books and he never copied pictures. And beyond the confines of his country he had never traveled. Was he not, then, narrow and provincial? In a sense he was, as all genuine men and women are. Just because he knew Scotland so well and loved her so intensely, was he a poet of the world and of humanity. Love of home is a universal quality. Cosmopolitan people are degenerate. They have lost more in depth than they have gained in breadth. The man who scorns his own people is scorned of all others. The ardent patriot who defends his country in every emergency, and not the captious citizen ever ready to confess her faults, is the type of true manhood, understood and appreciated the world over.

In the poetry of Burns there is no suggestion of the pent atmosphere of the study infected with the smoke of



the midnight candle, but it is all fresh with the caller air as it sweeps over heath and moor. His rhymes came to him as he walked the fields and by the streams, and they are the harmonies of nature set to song.

There is a quick movement in all his composition. He never lingers in description. A line will serve, or, at the most, as in his description of the brook in Hallowe'en, a verse.

“Whyles o’er a linn the burnie plays  
As thro’ the glen it wimpelt,  
Whyles round a rocky scaur it strays  
Whyles in a wiel it dimpelt;  
Whyles glittered to the nightly rays,  
Wi’ bickerin’ dancin’ dazzle,  
Whyles clookit underneath the braes  
Below the spreading hazel.”

In his song of “Westlin Winds” he brings the birds of Scotland before us, each in a line.

“The partridge loves the fruitful fells,  
The plover loves the mountains,  
The woodcock haunts the lonely dells,  
The soaring hern the fountains;  
Through lofty groves the cushat roves,  
The path of man to shun it;  
The hazel bush o’erhangs the thrush,  
The spreading thorn the linnet.”

The essential qualities of Burns’ poems are their truth and humanity. His scenic descriptions are but the framing of some human incident, and he uses bird and beast and flowers always to point some moral or adorn some tale of interest to man. He wrote as he felt, and so he wrote sometimes sadly and sometimes bitterly; sadly, for he was often seized with melancholy, and bitterly, because he felt often that he was harshly used. But, fortunately for us and for him, his muse sought him most in his brighter moods, and

“We see amid the fields of Ayr  
A ploughman who in foul or fair,  
Sings at his task,  
So clear we know not if it is  
The laverock’s song we hear or his,  
Nor care to ask.”



In the meanest creature and the humblest incident that enters into his life, this ploughman finds a poem,—in the daisy that he upturns, the field mouse, a wounded hare, his aged ewe, his dog, his auld mare, the haggis, and even in the toothache. And a louse upon a lady's bonnet furnishes the occasion of profound moralizing.

“O wad some power the giftie gie us,  
To see ourselves as ithers see us,  
It wad fra mony a blunder free us,  
And foolish notion.”

In all literature there is no more beautiful picture of humble life than he gives us in the “Cotter's Saturday Night.” It has invested the cottage with a charm of interest beyond the romance of the castle. It has lightened the task of many a weary toiler and kept hope in the heart of the heavy laden, and above all, it has taught that

“To make a happy fireside clime  
For weans and wife,  
That's the true pathos and sublime  
Of human life.”

Had Burns lived longer, or had his circumstances in life been different, he might have given us some great epic or dramatic work. He contemplated one but it was never begun. That a great lyric drama was within the reach of his powers, his cantata of “The Jolly Beggars” abundantly proves. But “Tam O'Shanter” was his most ambitious production, and this, for picturesque description, for rapid transitions, and for a wonderful blending of mirth and morality, is not to be surpassed.

The austere critic thinks that Burns deals too lightly with Tam's foibles, and so he thinks of Shakespeare in his dealing with Falstaff. But these great natures were kindly both, and could see the soul of goodness in things evil, and their teaching loses nothing of its force because of its gentleness.

Burns could not even rail at the devil without speaking at least one word of kindly admonition.

“Fare you weel, auld nickie ben!  
O wad ye tak a thought an’ men!  
Ye aiblins might, I dinna ken,  
Still hae a stake  
I’m wae to think upo’ yon den,  
Even for your sake.”

The songs of Burns will always be the chief delight of his readers, for they run the whole gamut of human passion and sentiment.

He sings of woman, and of every woman that ever touched his heart or caught his fancy, and then, lest some one might feel slighted, he sang to all the sex in his “Green grow the rushes O!” Criticism of these songs is impossible. They must be read, or, better, they must be sung by some loved voice, and then the heart will feel their power. To no mere trick of verse do they owe their charm. It is the genuineness of their sentiment, the reality of their passion, which holds us in thrall. It has been noted that in “Highland Mary” there is not a single perfect rhyme, and this is true, but who cares for that, it is none the less the sweetest song ever written by man to commemorate a pure and a lost love.

And where is there such a song of that love which never grows old as “John Anderson, My Jo?”

In other fields of lyric verse, he is also the master. What drinking song better than “Willie brewed a peck of maut;” what battle hymn more inspiring than “Bannockburn?” Who has sounded in such trumpet tones the principles of equality as he in “A man’s a man for a’ that?” And when, among the many millions who speak the English tongue, friends are gathered together, in what song do they pour out their gladness, but “Auld Lang Syne?”

He pictured himself often as a wreck upon life’s sea, and envied sometimes those whose “prudent, cautious self control,” kept them from the rocks; and yet, of all the

merchant argosies that, sailing under summer skies and over summer seas, came safely into the port of their destiny, how many, aye, were there any, bearing in their holds a freight so precious to humanity as the flotsam and the jetsam cast ashore by the wreck of Robert Burns?

But it is not for us to speak of his life as a wreck. Although he died while his manhood was in early prime, he had realized the inspiring wish of his youth, some useful plan or book to make or sing a song at least. He made the book, he sang the song, and the book is read and the song is heard the wide world over.

# ROBERT BURNS

By Willis Leonard Clanahan

Read by Miss Maye McCamish Hedrick

Scottish Day, August 15, 1904

O Bard of Freedom, on whose brow  
A century's fame is shining now,  
Thy spirit be with us! for thou  
Has taught us all  
How men who must to monarchs bow  
For truth may fall.

O teacher of the sons of men,  
By burning words and fervid pen,  
Come, and abide with us again,  
That we may know  
The soul that shone, a beacon, then,  
With deathless glow!

Though mean and humble was thy lot,  
Thy parentage all but forgot,  
Fame sought thee where the crowd was not,  
And brought thee forth,  
A poet from a lonely cot,  
To light the earth.

Thy songs, that smell of the sweet sod  
Where bluebells wave and thistles nod,  
Where barley grows and plowmen plod  
And daisies spring,  
Lift up the eager soul to God,  
Our only King.

Of love and truth, what tender lays  
Thy spirit gave us! What a maze  
Of passion blinded thee, in days  
When thou wert young,  
And sounded forth sweet woman's praise  
With tuneful tongue!

What songs of friendship true and tried,  
That shall eternally abide,  
Of love that for a friend had died,  
Didst thou attune!  
Thou wert the truth personified,  
O Bard of Doon!

Thou didst immortalize the land  
That gave thee being. Thou didst stand  
Alone, unaided; yet thy hand  
    Wrote down the fame  
Of stern old Caledonia's grand  
    And deathless name.

By thee in human hearts wast bred  
A love of simple things—a dread  
Of Cruelty and Wrong, that tread  
    On Truth and Right;  
Of Avarice, whose greed is fed  
    By soulless Might.

By thee the simple creed was taught  
To harm no man by deed or thought;  
To pain no living thing in aught,  
    Be 't mouse or man,  
That in His wisdom God has wrought  
    In His great plan.

But more than all thy soul did scan  
The true nobility of man,  
And thou didst help to raise the ban  
    From spirits cowed  
By poverty—more bitter than  
    The grave and shroud.

O best-beloved poet! pray  
Accept the tribute which we lay  
Before thee in our eager way;  
    Our souls' own choice!  
Be with us in thy house to-day,  
    While we rejoice.

THE reader of these pages will note that most of the quotations from Burns are in the Scottish vernacular. "The Doric dialect of South Scotland, in which Burns wrote, only increased the charm of his writing for me," said Judge Sale. In Mr. Lehman's address was this more extended reference to the same distinctive quality of Burns' writings: "Before Burns the Scottish tongue had not attained to the dignity of literary recognition. He chose it deliberately as the medium of his song, and it mastered him as much as he mastered it. Little of what he has written in pure English rises above the level of mediocrity, and it would not be possible to anglicize his Scottish verse without distinct impairment of its poetic quality."

In Mr. Reedy's opinion, "the poet has told his life story in his song, and told it with a splendid simplicity in the language of the Scots farmer and peasant. When he essays literary English, speaking generally, the magic, the glamour vanishes."

It is a curious fact that where the world now sees charm and strength in Burns, his earliest literary recognition found fault. A copy of the little *Kilmarnock* book was carried to Edinburgh by Professor Stewart when he went up from the banks of Ayr to commence his winter session at the university. It was given to Henry Mackenzie who was editing *The Lounger*, and whose judgment as a critic went far in that generation. Mackenzie was the author of "The Man of Feeling," one of the most popular books of the day, a book which Burns in his youth had read so often that it had been worn out. Mackenzie read this first collection of Burns' poems and wrote his opinion of it in *The Lounger*. The review introduced Burns to the literary world. At a meeting of the Burns Club of St. Louis this tribute of Mackenzie was produced and read. It is in striking contrast with the present estimate of Burns. Mackenzie wrote:

"In the discovery of talents generally unknown, men are apt to indulge the same fond partiality as in all other discoveries which themselves have made. And hence we have had repeated instances of painters and poets who have been drawn from obscure situations, and held forth to public notice and applause by the extravagant encomiums of their introducers; whose merit though perhaps somewhat neglected, did not appear to have been much under-valued by the world, and could not support by its own intrinsic excellence that superior place which the enthusiasm of its patrons would have assigned it.

"I know not if I shall be accused of such enthusiasm and partiality, when I introduce to my readers a poet of our own country, with whose writings I have lately become acquainted; but if I am not greatly deceived, I think I may safely pronounce him a genius of no ordinary rank. The person to whom I allude is Robert Burns, an Ayrshire ploughman, whose poems were sometime ago published in a country town in the west of Scotland, with no other ambition, if would seem than to circulate among the inhabitants of the country where he was born, to obtain a little fame from those who had heard of his talents. I hope I shall not be thought to assume too much, if I endeavor to place him in a higher point of view, to call for a verdict of his country upon the merits of his works, and to claim for him those honors which their excellence appears to deserve."

Then followed this most extraordinary criticism upon Burns:

"One bar indeed his birth and education have opposed to his fame—the language in which most of his poems are written. Even in Scotland, the provincial dialect which Ramsey and he have used is now read with a difficulty which greatly damps the pleasure of the reader; in England it cannot be read at all, without such a constant reference to a glossary as nearly to destroy that pleasure. Some of his productions, however, especially those of the grave style are almost English."



SOME three hundred Burns Clubs in all parts of the world have united to form the Burns Federation. The Burns Club of St. Louis is one of these. The objects, as set forth in the constitution of the Federation, are:

"To strengthen and consolidate by universal affiliation the bond of fellowship existing among the members of Burns Clubs; to superintend the publication of works pertaining to Burns; to acquire a fund for the purchase and preservation of holograph manuscripts and other relics connected with the life of the poet."

The Federation was inaugurated at Kilmarnock. There offices are maintained in connection with the Burns Library and Museum. Annual meetings of the Federation are held. A periodical known as the Burns Chronicle is issued. At the head of the Federation as Honorary Presidents are the Earl of Rosebery and Andrew Carnegie. Exchange of greetings is one of the pleasing forms in which the relationship between Burns Clubs find expression.

From Poosie Nansie's Hostelry, The Jolly Beggars' Burns Club sent this "warmest greeting" to the Burns Club of St. Louis on the 1913 anniversary.

Gie us a canny hour at e'en  
A' met in Robin's mem'ry O,  
Then warldly cares an' warldly spleen  
May a' gae tapsaltrie O.

Thomas Harvey of Mauchline founded The Jolly Beggars Club, as he explains in a letter to President Bixby, "to remove a reproach, there being none when I came here." He is a native of Ayr. From family tradition he has contributed this to the store of the St. Louis Club's information about Burns:

"It may interest you to know that Burns, when at Kirkoswald school, spent every week end at Dalwhat farm, my great grandfather's, John Graham's. John Graham was a full brother of Douglas, tenant of O'Shanter, Burns' Tam. My mother told me Uncle Douglas' wife was very superstitious and believed in witches, warlocks and the like. He had a lot of money to get in Ayr one market day and had it stored in his bonnet. It came on a fearful night and on the shore road he was nearly blown off his nag. His bonnet went with all his cash. He held on for dear life, and manufactured the story about Alloway kirk in a blaze to explain

the loss of his money to his wife. She believed it. The story spread and Burns got it at Dalwhat. There was general laughter afterwards when the storm subsided and Douglas quietly mounted and searched the road, luckily finding his bonnet and money all safe in a wood where it had blown. Almost in his last years, when at Dumfries, Burns told the narrative he had heard at Kirkoswald to Captain Grose, the antiquarian, whom he there met, and at his request shaped and put it, without effort, into the immortal lines, Tam O'Shanter."

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